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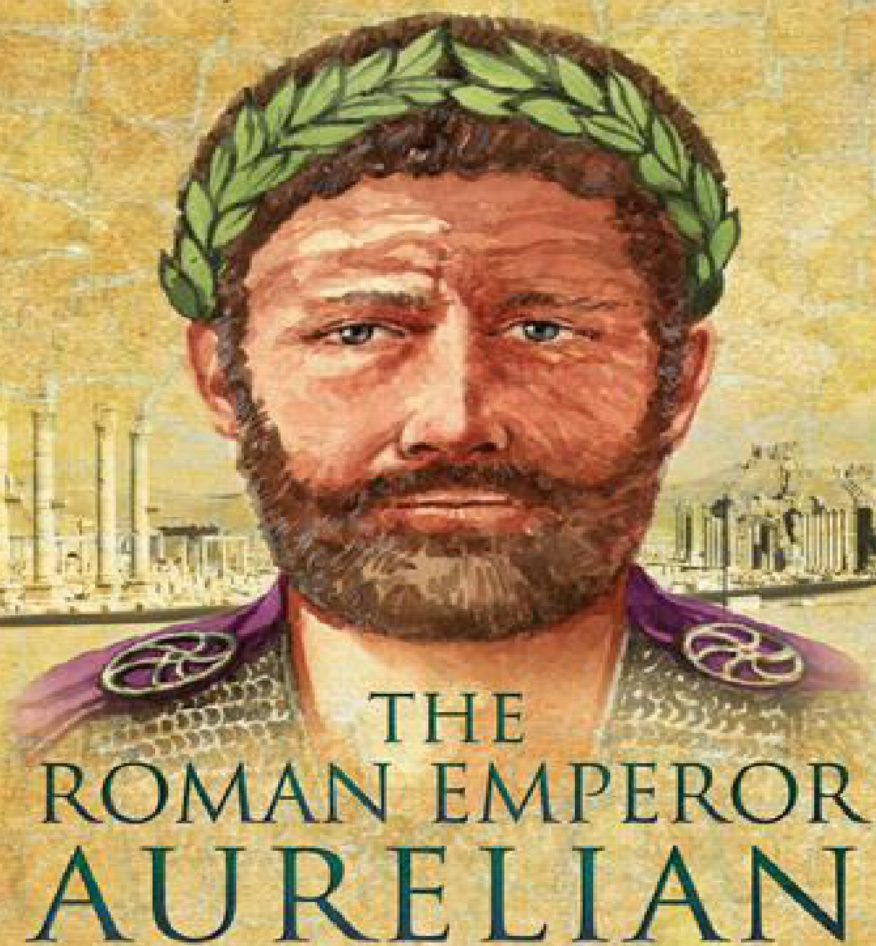
Above: Reconstruction of Aurelian's appearance from surviving coin profiles, accounts by contemporary writers and similarities to third-century emperors. Original watercolour for this book commissioned by the author from the portrait artist David Greenwood (Crowthorne, Berkshire, UK).

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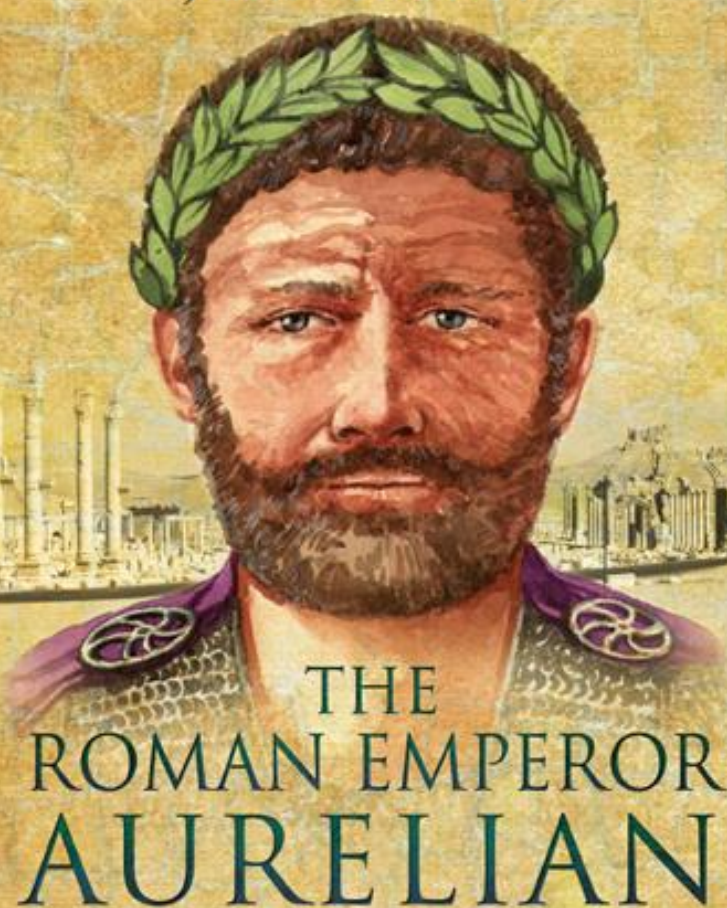


THE
ROMAN EMPEROR
AURELIAN

RESTORER OF THE WORLD

NEW REVISED EDITION

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Above: Reconstruction of Aurelian's appearance from surviving coin profiles, accounts by contemporary writers and similarities to third-century emperors. Original watercolour for this book commissioned by the author from the portrait artist David Greenwood (*Crowthorne, Berkshire, UK*).

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The Roman Emperor Aurelian

Restorer of the World

John F. White



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This book is the successor to my original *Restorer of the World* book, and has been substantially revised, rewritten and augmented with much new information.

John White, Wokingham, 2014

A Note about Footnotes

The presentation of sources is always a difficult problem. If the author supplies many citation footnotes, he pleases researchers but irritates readers. If he does not supply footnotes, the position is reversed.

The first edition of this book was intended originally to popularize the emperor Aurelian for a non-academic readership. However, it became in demand by many academic readers. This has created a difficulty: I do not want to discourage non-academic readers with the tiresome need to keep flicking backwards and forwards to a list of references that provide greater details of that which I have written. On the other hand, I am aware that academic readers want to be able to track back to my sources.

As a compromise, which doubtless will please no one, I have chosen to restrict my footnotes almost entirely to references to the literature. There will be very few explanatory details found in the footnotes; non-academic readers need not feel that they are missing anything by ignoring the footnotes completely.

In addition, standard reference works, or ancient chronicles, that will be used in almost every chapter are simply clustered together at the beginning of [chapter 3](#) ('The Start of Recovery'), note 1, as 'Principal Original Sources'.

Sources in English, or English translation, will be preferred where available, again for the benefit of lay readers.

John White

Introduction

About the Emperor Aurelian

Ask any well-informed layman in Britain to name a few Roman emperors, and most will respond immediately with Julius Caesar (who was not, in fact, an emperor, but a dictator), Augustus, Nero and Constantine. With a little more reflection, and depending on how much of the marvellous television adaptation of Robert Graves' semi-fictional work *I, Claudius* they can recall, they might also be able to name Claudius, Caligula and Tiberius. A few might have heard of that remarkable administrator, the emperor Diocletian, while the names of Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus will be familiar to those who have seen the popular film *Gladiator*.

Not one of these laymen will know the name of the emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275), not to be confused with the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius. Yet if it had not been for the actions of this one man – often acclaimed justly by modern historians of ancient Rome as a 'superman' – the Roman Empire would probably have split asunder by the end of the third century AD, leaving a very different heritage from that which so shapes our lives today, the Christian-Roman European culture that has for so long held sway.

The ancient Roman author of the biography of Aurelian found in the Augustan Histories has this to say:

When we had come to the Temple of the Sun consecrated by the emperor Aurelian, he [the prefect of the city of Rome] asked me who had written up the life of that man. When I replied none was known by me in Latin, but some in Greek, the revered man poured out the anguish of his groan through these words: 'Therefore Thersites, Sinon and other such monsters of antiquity both we know well and of whom posterity will speak; shall the divine Aurelian, most illustrious emperor, most stern general, through whom the whole world is restored to the Roman name, not be known to our descendants? May God avert this madness!'

And so, he informs us, the Latin biographer began his work (for its value, see below), yet posterity does indeed remain generally ignorant of Aurelian's achievements as 'Restorer of the World' and his acclamation as a god. His accomplishment is at least the equal of Augustus, who created the Roman Empire as we know it, for Aurelian

had to stitch the empire back together after the disruptions caused by endemic civil wars and seemingly interminable and unstoppable invasions from outside the Roman frontiers by barbarians seeking loot.

Modern scholarship is scarcely more informative. Archaeology has rediscovered remarkably few inscriptions or other lasting monuments from Aurelian's time, providing little new evidence, and a quick count in the indices of the prestigious *Journal of Roman Studies* of the number of references to Aurelian from the journal's beginnings in 1910 to 2013 scarcely reaches double figures.¹

How is it that Aurelian's achievements are so poorly recognized? The answer can be found most readily in the lack of proper historians during the middle of the third century. The fame of Julius Caesar and Augustus rests on the contributions of several outstanding historians of the early Roman Empire, men such as Plutarch, Suetonius and Tacitus, who lived during a tranquil age in the course of which they could consult imperial records. Marcus Aurelius, the acclaimed philosopher, and the sterner Septimius Severus enjoyed the attentions of the historian Cassius Dio early in the third century. Again, the reputations of Diocletian and Constantine depend heavily on the laudatory, and sometimes not so laudatory, biographies by pagan and Christian authors during the settled period towards the end of the fourth century, after Aurelian had put everything back together. However, in the chaos of the mid-third century, few could be found to write down the chronicle of the climactic events occurring around them, records were destroyed or falsified and few monuments or other enduring objects were left to be uncovered by modern archaeology.

Reasons for writing

My own interest in early Roman history arose when I was taught Latin at school. Part of the course involved the study and comprehension of Roman culture and history, for which I was fortunate enough to have an enthusiastic teacher. It was while reading Gibbon's celebrated *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that I became awestruck by Aurelian's spectacular accomplishments, something that Gibbon himself seems rather to have taken for granted as though empire fixing were all in a day's work.

After that I sought eagerly for more up-to-date texts on Aurelian, but could find none at all in English and only essays in German (Groag, 1903) and in French (Homo, 1904); now century-old works lacking knowledge of modern archaeology and coin analysis. Part of the reason for this omission is certainly the shortage of material from

which to make a full-size history, but part, I think, can be attributed to the interminable debates about the accuracy of the sources that probably render any serious scholars reluctant to stick their necks out and say 'Here is Aurelian.' Two modern texts, Cizek's *L'Empereur Aurélien et son Temps* and Watson's *Aurelian and the Third Century*,² have sought to fill the gap with closely argued critiques of the recent academic literature for classical scholars already familiar with the background, and Saunders' 1991 PhD thesis³ has been invaluable in my research, but there remains no readable popular account suitable for the layman who would wish to know more about the period.

This book is intended as a guide to some of history's most critical turning points, and it is derivative in the sense that I have not been out into the field to dig up any new artefacts. This book is based on the ancient literature, published academic papers, and published reviews and books summarizing coins, papyri and inscriptions. I have spent many happy hours carrying out my own research in the library of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies based at the Senate House in Malet Street, London, and I wish to record my gratitude to the friendly and helpful staff there who gave me so much assistance. Modern scholars will look in vain for new facts about the mid-third century, but I hope they may yet discover some new insights from an account written from a fresh perspective. I have been careful to use the best-agreed modern dates for the events of the period, but have not hesitated to put my own interpretation upon them.

The literary sources

The principal literary sources that survive, and which also cover the period in which we are interested, may be divided conveniently into two: the Latin and the Greek writers. Unfortunately, these are frequently in conflict, although the evidence of coins, inscriptions and archaeology has often enabled us to resolve some of the discrepancies. There are also contemporary Persian writers, and an Arab tradition, the accuracy of each concerning Roman events being very poor.

It is noticeable in any library that deals in ancient Rome that there are today many more commentaries about the surviving ancient histories than there are histories themselves. The harsh reality is that virtually no new discoveries of hidden ancient literature can be made, while by contrast the number of classical scholars keeps increasing. The interminable scholarly game of 'What did the writer really mean?' has indeed uncovered or highlighted some incongruities, but it has also led to the propagation of many theories about Roman history that

can, most charitably, be said to be unlikely – I nearly said bizarre. Unlike many modern historians, I do not hold that those who live some 1,750 years after the events they describe must necessarily know more than those writing 50–100 years after the same events; quite the reverse. The ancient writers assumed naturally that their readers shared a common stock of culture and of knowledge, so that many details could be left unsaid. Hearsay alone would give the early historians an insight into the background of those whose lives they described and we cannot guess how many key elements colouring judgements – obvious to the writer and his audience – may be completely unknown to us today.

In ancient times the purpose of history was widely held to be to instruct, rather than to be strictly accurate, and therefore the modern obsession with trivial details would have been beyond the early writers' instincts or grasp. They plagiarized each other's work shamelessly and had no inhibitions about annotating or editing existing histories. The difficulty of mass production of written works also added to the problems, for the printing press would not be invented for more than another 1,000 years. Copies made by hand are likely to introduce anonymous errors, and therefore later scribes would insert corrections as they made their own copies. Thus it occurs that the original text may be 'corrected' with a false amendment, and the text loses its original accuracy. Those copies of the Latin and Greek historians that survived until the Renaissance, when most were printed and reprinted, had been copied by hand again and again, with all the scope for error and editorial 'improvement' that is implied.

Worse, from the standpoint of a modern historian, is the fact that few contemporary readers seemed to be interested in anything more than brief summaries of poorly dated facts from the Roman age. Ancient writers could have dated events quite accurately, had they so chosen, simply by reference to 'years since the foundation of Rome', but very few seem to have adopted this obvious method even though the (legendary) date was widely known and accepted. Medieval readers showed an apparently similar disdain for the particulars of (non-Christian) ancient history, with the result that very few detailed histories have survived from the Roman period to our age. Many of the survivors are known from just one neglected manuscript. It seems appropriate here to acknowledge our huge debt to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), who commissioned the *Excerpta Historica* – a recopying of all manuscripts

in the imperial libraries, maintaining the original order of fragments where the remainder of the text could not be deciphered.

In an age when no one cares very much about historical accuracy or even dating, it is evident that the views of contemporaries are always likely to be of more value than those who consult vague summaries at a much later date. With this understanding, let us examine the surviving texts. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, we have to turn first to the Greek authors before later Latin writers.

The nearest contemporary source for Aurelian's period is the Greek historian Dexippus, who wrote two outstanding eyewitness accounts (*Scythia* and *Chronicle*) of the wars against the Goths in the middle of the third century. Unfortunately, only fragments survive. His *Chronicle* is believed to have ended in 270, shortly before Aurelian began his rule, but the *Scythia* contains fragments of the early part of Aurelian's reign. The early fifth-century Greek author Eunapius also wrote a history that is thought to have been a continuation of the *Chronicle* of Dexippus, and covers the period 270–404; thus, he was certainly not a contemporary of Aurelian. Again, little of the original work survives, but the Byzantine Photius (ninth century) tells us that Eunapius wrote two editions for the same period, and that Eunapius himself informed his readers that the period 270–355 was covered very summarily. The works of both Greek historians live on in later books by three other Greeks: Zosimus, who wrote early in the fifth century and whose account ends in 410, just before the sack of Rome; Syncellus and Zonaras, two Byzantine historians who provided additional information, apparently from sources now lost, in the ninth and twelfth centuries, long after the events they describe. Syncellus compiled an annotated catalogue of history up to his time; for our period he relied heavily on Eusebius (see below). His chronicle has come down to us wholly intact. Zonaras compiled a world history, and stated explicitly that Zosimus had made heavy use of Dexippus and Eunapius for his work.

Petrus Patricius and the 'Anonymous Continuator of Cassius Dio' are also fragmentary offerings written in Greek that once described the emperors from Augustus to Constantius II (361). Some believe that these two authors are one and the same. The loss of all these pre-medieval histories is particularly frustrating, since the surviving fragments indicate that they were of much detail and high reliability.

The *Panegyrici Latini*, a collection of laudatory speeches made to what appears to be a random selection of assorted fourth-century

emperors – such is the indiscriminatory survival of texts from Roman times – contain brief references to our period. The best contemporary Latin source for Aurelian ought certainly therefore to have been the panegyric(s) that were addressed to him as emperor. Unfortunately, no such panegyric has survived, although it would be astounding if none had ever been written to the most accomplished emperor of the third century, particularly since he spent many months settled at Rome during the last year of his reign. We must assume that at least one such panegyric was indeed written, and that later sources could access it for the next fifty years or more. We know the format from extant panegyrics: wide-sweeping glorification of the emperor and his achievements, both military and civil; a denigration of his enemies and a narration of the fate that befell them; a careful avoidance of any content that might be interpreted as critical; and some factual subject matter that might or might not be accurate, depending on the knowledge of the speaker. In any case, the entire eulogy had to be credible. If the emperor addressed had suffered a major disaster during his reign, it might well be tactful to avoid any mention of it, but to claim the disaster as a victory would sound ridiculous to all present and such a claim would not be made. The facts, then, of a panegyric would be as accurate as the panegyrist knew, but uncomfortable truths would be avoided.

There are also brief mentions of the third-century emperors by the early Christian authors, such as Lactantius, who was a near contemporary of Aurelian and prepared early in the fourth century his Latin chronicle *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, and Eusebius, who composed in Greek his *Church History* and *Chronicle* during the fourth century. The accounts are generally slanted by the emperor's treatment of the Christians. However, the early Church was particularly concerned with accuracy in all its sources – anything less might have been construed as blasphemy – and was also one of the chief instigators of the best methods for preserving and recopying ancient texts. Thus the Christian writers are exceptionally reliable, in the sense that they were writing honestly, even if they are not always the most accurate. Eusebius makes it clear that he is often quoting from official records. Further, it was the early Church that first popularized the binding of parchment together to make the 'codex', a book-like collection of parchments that would withstand heavy use better than the older scroll. The *Chronicle* of Eusebius is now lost, but Jerome, also known as Hieronymus, used it with attribution and extended it to 376 for his Latin *Chronicle*. The latter not only survives,

but has in turn been preserved by Orosius (*History against the Pagans*), who wrote in the fifth century, and by Jordanes (*The Origin and Deeds of the Romans*, sixth century). Orosius' work would later be translated into Anglo-Saxon on the orders of King Alfred, whence it became the standard medieval textbook on world history. It is completely derived from other compilations and concise chronicles.

Official court records were mined allegedly at the beginning of the fourth century by six different writers, to create a series of biographies of emperors of the second and third centuries. Aurelian is one of the emperors described. The collected biographies have come down to us under the title *Writers of Augustan History*, and are described in much more detail below.

It was not until the settled second half of the fourth century that Latin writers began to take a greater interest in the events of preceding centuries, when several short histories were written. The principal Latin writers covering our period are Aurelius Victor (*De Caesaribus*), the anonymous epitomator who created a separate work also known as *De Caesaribus* and Eutropius (*Breviarium*). An epitome is an abbreviated form of the original with annotations added, created by a copyist.

Victor's work was written by a provincial governor in 360. It covers all the emperors from Augustus to Constantius II in a fairly condensed manner, and adopts a highly moral tone. Unfortunately, there is a large gap in surviving manuscripts omitting a significant part of Aurelian's life. The epitomator who wrote *De Caesaribus* describes the period from Augustus to Theodosius (end of the fourth century), and the book is thought to derive from the lost 'Annals' of Nichomachus Flavianus, a late fourth-century writer who, judging by the evidence of the epitome itself, was an author of surprising accuracy.

The *Breviarium* of Eutropius was written very close to 369 at the request of the emperor Valens, as a short, summarized history for the emperor himself and for others in the eastern half of the Roman Empire who lacked knowledge, but not curiosity, about Rome's background. Eutropius, who was a high-ranking civilian and would later become proconsul of Roman Asia, had a hidden agenda: he seems to have been pressing for a Roman attack on Persia and biases his history favourably towards previous exploits in that direction – perhaps at the instigation of the emperor himself. The *Breviarium* has proved to be an exceedingly popular introduction to the Roman era ever since it was first published. It was copied early into Greek, while

the Latin version served as a text book for schools during many hundreds of years, well into the nineteenth century. Paul the Deacon (eighth century) extended the *Breviarium* from the time of Eutropius to that of the eastern Roman emperor Justinian (sixth century).

The original *Breviarium* was intended to be short, and covers the period from the foundation of Rome to the emperor Jovian (363–364) in only some seventy pages of modern typescript, but was evidently still too lengthy for Valens, who commissioned an even shorter summary from the historian Festus of which only the second half survives. Festus' history, written in Latin, is overtly biased in favour of past Roman successes against Persia, and contains some material found otherwise only in Greek sources. It may therefore have been derived originally from a lost Greek history. Some of his facts, not found elsewhere in previous histories, were also incorporated into the chronicles of Jerome, Jordanes and Syncellus.

German scholars who examined the original texts, or rather – let us be clear about this – the earliest texts still surviving, which had themselves been copied many times and perhaps edited away from the originals, noted that the histories of Victor and Eutropius shared many details, as well as many errors. Those parts of the histories that covered common ground, i.e. from the first emperors onwards, contained little information that was unique to either history. Enmann proposed in 1883 that both Victor and Eutropius had relied for information on a common source, now lost, that he named *Kaisergeschichte* (*History of Emperors*). Internal evidence suggests that the *Kaisergeschichte* may have covered the years from about 30 BC to AD 357 and appears to have comprised little more than names of emperors, their place and date of accession, and their principal achievements; probably it also contained many errors.

The contention that the *Kaisergeschichte* provided the primary source to Victor and to Eutropius, at any rate for the later Roman emperors, has been disputed, but seems at least reasonable and now represents the majority view among modern historians. If one theorizes further that the *Kaisergeschichte* is just a fancy name for a short list of written facts and speculations about the emperors that was widely available to the well educated in the fourth century, then there can be little room for dissent. Multiple copying and recopying of the list by scribes or slaves is certain to have introduced errors of transcription that would multiply slowly with each fresh copy.

It is likely that the *Kaisergeschichte* was strongly pro-senatorial in its

tone, and the emperors were judged by their attitude towards the Roman Senate. In consequence, or perhaps as independent judgements, all three of the major Latin writers, Victor, Eutropius and the Augustan Histories (below), show similar partiality. The emperor Gallienus (253–268) is criticized particularly harshly by all. He presided over the near disintegration of the Roman Empire, although it is unlikely that the blame was his even in part.

The *Kaisergeschichte* may have been the only extant source of information in Latin for the period of the mid-third century to a historian writing in the fourth century. Victor and Eutropius (according to the modern hypothesis) then mined it for basic information to which Victor added other recollections – and a great deal of moralizing – while Eutropius, whose needs were simpler, did little more than summarize the *Kaisergeschichte* so thoroughly that the original source fell out of use and thus failed to survive to modern times.

The three Greek writers Zosimus, Syncellus and Zonaras, mentioned earlier, offer a considerable check, in both senses, on the Latin writers, since they provide both independent confirmation of events and sometimes ameliorate the reputations of emperors, such as Gallienus, who showed less enthusiasm for the Senate.

Much more curious are the series of short biographies of emperors by those known collectively as the ‘Writers of Augustan History’ (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*), abbreviated here to Augustan Histories (writers create histories, not history). The entries purport to have been written by six authors during the period 285–335, allegedly at the request of the emperors Diocletian and Constantine, or of other eminent Romans. The authors of the period that concerns this book are ‘Trebellius Pollio’ (The Two Gallieni, Thirty Tyrants, Claudius) and ‘Flavius Vopiscus of Syracuse’ (Aurelian, Tacitus, Probus, Four Tyrants, Carus and sons). Vopiscus informs us that, for Aurelian, he made use of ‘the written journals of that hero’ and also of ‘his wars arranged as a history’. He admits openly that his work may contain errors. The biography of Aurelian is the second longest in the entire Augustan Histories.

It was recognized long ago – by the great Edward Gibbon, among others – that the Augustan Histories contain many peculiarities. In discussing these below, let us remind ourselves of one key feature: *all* the extant texts derive ultimately from just one ninth-century codex (parchment arranged as a book), which appears to be incomplete.

Thus all subsequent commentators are at the mercy of this truth: we have no way of knowing the extent of tampering with the original text. It is entirely possible that an editor has been at work in the five to six centuries that preceded the version that survives. In this context, we must note that a medieval scholar definitely *did* tamper with the principal source of the Augustan Histories, the *Codex Palatinus 899*, which had been rediscovered by the Renaissance in 1475, by adding and subtracting material. We can be sure of this, since the original codex remains intact.

The first major problem with the text is the remarkable fact that it attempts to cover every emperor from Hadrian up to, but not including, Diocletian. Yet the six authors have not overlapped at all; no emperor is covered by more than one biography. It is puzzling to note that the text jumps straight into the life of Hadrian without any preamble, and it is believed that an introduction and the biographies of two preceding emperors, Nerva and Trajan, might have been lost. There are other gaps apparent in the text too.

The second problem lies with the use of anachronistic terms. For example, some military titles are employed before, so far as we know, they had been invented. The authors of the Augustan Histories claim to have consulted the Ulpian Library at Rome for sources and copies of letters, but many of the examples again contain anachronisms. Thus, in one letter an emperor addresses a Persian king who had yet to ascend the throne. Another difficulty lies with the appallingly sloppy nature of the histories. The accounts jump backwards and forwards between events within each biography without there having been any subsequent attempt at tidying or revision to make the narrative coherent. Some passages in the biographies bear a striking similarity to those found in Victor and Eutropius when describing the same emperor. The overall effect is of an absent-minded lecturer dictating notes and, indeed, at one point the author confides to the reader that he *is* dictating to his secretary.

In the case of Aurelian, the narrative proceeds uniformly from the birth to the death and achievements of the emperor – and then starts all over again, as though the narrator has just discovered a major new source of information and has tacked it in the form of notes onto the end of the existing biography without any attempt at combining the two sections. The second section bears many similarities to information also found in Victor and Eutropius, and implies a common source – perhaps added at a much later date, but by whom?

Taken individually, these problems do not add up to very much. Do the biographies not overlap? Perhaps the authors were commissioned to write different sections. Trouble with anachronisms? A later editor took a hand. I can remember how baffled I was to read, as a child, a fictional story, *Biggles Flies Again*, which had supposedly been written in 1932 but in which a central character describes shooting down a German 'Heinkel' aircraft over France. Heinkel became a famous aircraft manufacturer during the Second World War (1939–1945) and could not have been applicable for the First World War. The explanation, I learned many years later, was that the original version had accurately stated a 'Rumpler' biplane, but a later editor had gratuitously updated the aircraft type for the edition published in the 1950s. Do the Augustan Histories contain close similarities to Victor/Eutropius, and share the same errors? They must have copied the Histories, or the latter copied an early version of the *Kaisergeschichte* while Victor and Eutropius copied the later, extended version. Another explanation might be that an editor patched gaps in the Augustan Histories with sections taken from the later works.

All these difficulties, then, can be explained, but coincidence gets stretched further with every added explanation. In 1889 the German historian Dessau produced the startling hypothesis that *all* the biographies in the Augustan Histories were written by just one author, and that he wrote near the end of the fourth century, not the beginning. Another German scholar postulated, by comparison of grammatical and literary styles, that nearly all the documents and letters quoted in the Augustan Histories were written by the same original hand, and that these common documents were all fabricated. Further evidence of this was provided by a computer study in 1979, which demonstrated that sentence lengths in all the biographies of the Augustan Histories were very similar, but unlike those of control Latin texts.

This controversy has raged for more than a century now, and only future discoveries will resolve the problem definitively. It would certainly be desirable to find another manuscript of the Augustan Histories that pre-dates (say) the seventh century. We may note in passing that to check the authorship of ancient documents by analysis of style is a dangerous game, and the computer study mentioned above has been criticized on technical grounds. Recently one sceptic subjected the publications of one of the computer-critics of the authorship of certain letters to a similar analysis, and deduced that the

critic had written only half of his own research papers! However, most modern English-speaking historians accept the basic tenet of Dessau's thesis: the Augustan Histories were written by one author, later than generally supposed, and fictional documents were used to augment the text. We can never know why the Histories were so written. One might guess that a bored aristocrat wrote, or dictated, a Roman history for the amusement of his friends. A common view is that the Histories were actually written as a joke, or hoax.⁴

There remain some sceptics of the concept of one author for the Augustan Histories. I was careful to specify that this is the view of 'most modern Englishspeaking historians'. It is worth pointing up that this orthodox view, although certainly known in other European countries, is not accepted so readily.

As I have described above, it is possible to assign all of its inconsistencies to later editing and to the use of defective sources, such as the *Kaisergeschichte*, for the period that concerns this work. As already related, the ancient writers were more concerned to draw the correct moral judgements from history than to worry about its accuracy. The fictitious documents within the Augustan Histories would be simply a device to convey a sentiment. There was already a well-established practice of quoting for posterity a general's exhortation to his troops before a battle, although no one could possibly have recorded the speech at the time. Magie, editor of my copy of the Augustan Histories, claims in his introduction that the early third-century Latin author Marius Maximus, known from other sources as a verbose quoter of official documents, must also have cited at least some fictional documents, in view of the fact that no contemporary author is known to have browsed through official records for real accuracy. Magie applies the same argument to the author Aelius Cordus although, since the latter is known only from the Augustan Histories, where he is cited often, the reasoning is dubious.

There can be no doubt that the Augustan Histories provide an unreliable source of historical information. The key question remains: why?

It is worth examining counter-arguments to the orthodox view (one fraudulent author, who wrote near the end of the fourth century), even if for no better reason than to remind readers that the hypothesis is just that: an hypothesis. The hypothesis is intriguing; it fits many facts well; it may well be right. But it is impossible to claim proof from an edifice of theory placed upon the foundation of just one,

damaged, ninth-century, original manuscript of unknown provenance.

The counter-arguments therefore are these:

1. If the Augustan Histories are a hoax, then the hoax is certainly long-winded and elaborate. The text amounts to about 755 Kbytes in the form of a text (.txt) computer file. It is far longer than any surviving history dated to the same period. To provide context, Suetonius' famous history of the early emperors amounts to about 569 Kbytes; Eutropius, 70 Kbytes; Aurelius Victor (*De Caesaribus*) 83 Kbytes; Ammianus Marcellinus requires 939 Kbytes for the surviving eighteen books of his narrative autobiography (1,617 Kbytes if the lost thirteen books are assumed to have the same average book size). Yet many commentators have remarked that the author(s) seem to be impatient and careless. Would one impatient and careless author continue a hoax with so much literary effort? The same result could have been achieved with a book restricted to just one quarter of the emperors cited.
2. Evidence of use of the *Kaisergeschichte*, Dexippus and Eunapius (or other Greek source) can be found in the Augustan Histories.⁵ This may not constitute what today we would call 'original research', but it does show that the author(s) tried to vary their sources.
3. Evidence of errors of transcription or simple misunderstanding are evident throughout. To take just

one example, the Roman commander Tenagino Probus has been named 'Probatus' in one place, and then confused with the future emperor Probus in another. These types of widespread errors are not consistent with wilful deception of the reader. They are, however, consistent with sloppy copying of original texts or over-reliance on folk memory for past events. Classical scholars today are not accustomed to interview eyewitnesses, and therefore can have no concept of how unreliable the memory of such witnesses can be. I found this out the hard way, trying to rationalize the accounts of several U-boat survivors, interviewed fifty years after the events, for a study on U-tankers. It is not the case that the accounts were intended to deceive, simply that the passage of time distorts the human memory, particularly if the witness has an *idée fixe* about some particular event. Many modern historians will not accept the validity of eyewitness accounts at all, if they were written down decades after the events they purport to describe.

4. Editing in the later part of the fourth century explains immediately many of the anachronisms and inconsistencies in the original text, as first pointed out in the late nineteenth century by the famous German historian Mommsen. Why should anyone want to edit the original authors? Firstly, to bring them up to date for a more modern audience (as with my old Biggles book). But

there may be a better explanation. Christianity was the official Roman religion by the second half of the fourth century, and a lot of pagans did not like it. Zosimus (the pagan Greek historian of the fifth century) resists no opportunity to get in a dig at the despised supplanter of his own beliefs. A late fourth-century pagan might have wished to achieve a similar objective by taking over the original works of six genuine authors of the Augustan Histories, and then inserting his own anti-Christian views both into the text and in the form of quoted 'letters' which he has added. The anti-Christian bias of the finished work as it has come down to us is evident.

5. The fictitious letters inserted into the text of the Augustan Histories may be simply a device to convey the author's thoughts, and there is slight evidence (above) that this device was already known to readers in the fourth century.

In the light of this undisputed poor reliability, of what value are the Augustan Histories to a modern writer? Some say that nothing in the Histories should be regarded as true, unless confirmed by other sources, but I am less cynical. My view is that a late, amateur, Roman historian moulded, for his own tendentious purposes, material from the most convenient contemporary sources, which varied from emperor to emperor. He may well have used genuine, but formerly brief, texts from those authors that appear now as the six named authors of the Augustan Histories, and extracted other colourful anecdotes from hearsay to fill out the accounts. At some point in the process, for the period covered in this book, the *Kaisergeschichte*, Dexippus, government propaganda and, critically, a panegyric to Aurelian (now lost) have probably been plundered, perhaps by a genuine 'Vopiscus' or by the later historian. Today we would call the result a 'cut- and-paste job', linked by the historian's added prejudices

that can be found, for example, in the dubious quoted 'letters'. Others have observed that the author(s) of the Histories has/have attempted to emulate the similar style of that well-known gossipmonger Suetonius. Given these constraints, the Augustan Histories may well be as accurate as contemporary memory permitted. Any other form of history would have invited ridicule, rather than laughter, from the author's readers or listeners, since public readings were common in Roman times.

In view of so much uncertainty, I have used material from the Augustan Histories in my account of the emperor Aurelian, but I have not used it uncritically, and all such use is marked clearly in my text. At least this stance enables me to avoid the common scholarly trap: first of declaring the Augustan Histories to be worthless, and then of quoting extensively from them whenever their argument supports the scholar's pet hypothesis, or when there is a book chapter that needs to be filled.

The 'Chronicler of 354' created an illustrated calendar, listing the pagan holidays including those 'good' emperors whose birthdays were still celebrated, the zodiac, consuls, urban prefects of Rome, Christian bishops and martyrs. Appended are a tourist map of contemporary Rome, a world history starting with Adam and a chronicle of the city of Rome. The original calendar, which was evidently given to a well-off Roman Christian, disappeared in medieval times, but fragments of several copies survive, enabling cross-checking for accuracy. The list of consuls starts after the time of the Roman kings and continues to the year AD 354; it is the most complete tabulation known. The city chronicle (*Chronica*) provides a chronological list of all the rulers of Rome, again starting with the kings, together with the length of their rule and any noteworthy events that occurred during their reign. Unfortunately, the city chronicle, while precise, is not particularly accurate. Aurelian's rule is given as five years, four months and twenty days. This figure has since been disproved by papyri (below), and other data are inaccurate too.

The source of the information in the city chronicle remains in dispute, and does not appear to be related to the *Kaisergeschichte*, which reinforces the idea that there may have been several contemporary lists of events in circulation with differing degrees of accuracy. Other Roman calendars have survived in very fragmentary form, but that of Polemius Silvius (449) is complete. It is thought to be astonishingly accurate, and the calendar writer probably had access

to several sources. One of the documents gives a list of all emperors and usurpers.

The fourth-century pagan ruler Julian (361-363), one of the most prolific of the emperors, has left a few references to Aurelian in his surviving material. His *Hymn to Helios* provides additionally some information concerning Aurelian's games to celebrate the god Sol. Ammianus Marcellinus, the outstanding historian of the late fourth century, makes passing mention of some of the events of the preceding century.

The Consularia Constantinopolitana (468) contain one of the earliest lists of consuls that is still extant. The data for Aurelian are accurate, including the dates of his accession (270), the construction of his wall (271) and his death at Caenophrurium (275). The source of the information is unclear, and the data for other emperors can be inaccurate.

John Malalas of Antioch (sixth century) wrote a world history in Greek from the Creation, which is riddled with errors for all but recent affairs. Malalas has not attracted the same degree of censure as the better-informed Augustan Histories, probably because he is assumed to have been as honest as the other Christian writers. The fact that parts of his work have had to be reconstructed from several translations into other ancient languages, in order to fill gaps in the original manuscripts, scarcely helps. For his account of Aurelian, it is necessary to consult the late seventh-century *Chronicle* by John of Nikiu, which itself is known today only in the form of an Ethiopian translation of an Arabic translation of the original Greek. An interesting component of Malalas' work concerns the physical description and age at death of almost every emperor. There *might*, perhaps, have been a portrait gallery of all the previous emperors at Constantinople, where Malalas spent the later part of his life, but most scholars prefer to regard these descriptions as pure invention. His ages for the emperors at death also differ from other sources, which do not agree among themselves either, where they exist at all, but he is at least in the same ballpark.

Cassiodorus was a sixth-century Italian who wrote a highly coloured account of Gothic history for his Gothic masters; little survives, but Jordanes summarized his story under the name *Getica* ('The Origin and Deeds of the Goths') and also created a Roman history *Romana* ('The Origin and Deeds of the Romans') a few years later. The latter is largely a copy of Jerome's *Chronicle*. Both works

mention Aurelian. The emperor Justinian in the sixth century authorized the creation of a huge summary of all existing Roman law, including pronouncements by previous emperors that were still current. A handful of Aurelian's edicts have survived into Justinian's Codex.

The Arabs still retain some legends concerning one of Aurelian's adversaries, Queen Zenobia of Palmyra. They were found originally in the *Universal History of al-Tabari* (839-923) and elsewhere. The Arab accounts generally are not in agreement with their Latin counterparts, but are of interest where the two sources overlap, sometimes aided by inscriptions of Arab Nabateans, the local people at the time of Aurelian.

The literary deficiencies of the middle of the third century have to some extent been made good by the continuing discoveries of coins,⁶ inscriptions and monuments,⁷ and papyri,⁸ although the supply is inevitably slow and unpredictable. The extent of monumentary evidence concerning Aurelian is depressingly small. There is no known statue, so that we know his appearance only from his coins, and the number of unique surviving inscriptions is probably little more than 200; the nineteenth-century compilers of Latin inscriptions scatter only a handful relating to Aurelian through their voluminous archives, while more recent discoveries bring the total to 150 unique Latin inscriptions in the Frankfurt University electronic database. Many are repetitive of one another, having been taken (for example) from milestones along an African road. There appear to be no Greek inscriptions from Greece⁹ (a handful are known from elsewhere), while only a few papyri survive that mention Aurelian. Inscriptions sometimes supply dates, although never in the modern BC/AD style that had yet to be invented. Pond¹⁰ analysed the inscriptions in 1970, and claimed to have found 224, of which only thirty-eight bore sufficient details to determine the year. The great majority were in Latin or Greek, although a few were found in other contemporary languages, and his total included those for Aurelian's wife, Severina. It is unclear whether Pond's count includes duplications among the various databases – many inscriptions are listed more than once even in the same database.

The turbulence and uncertainty of the times ensured that coin hoards, where the owners buried their coins in the ground for safety, were abundant. Unfortunately, the debasement of the same coins by the issuing mint has the result that most of the detail has often

deteriorated seriously by the time the hoard is excavated in modern times. Roman coins were produced at a number of mints, scattered around the empire, and the mints usually stamped a single-letter identifier onto each coin. In addition each mint was divided into several workshops (*officinae*), typically about two to eight per mint, which also stamped their own unique identification mark on the coins. It is thought that these markings were a deliberate attempt by the government to track down and identify those mints issuing defective or debased coins. The styles of the mints are quite characteristic, and an expert can frequently identify the issuer of a Roman coin even if the marks of both mint and workshop have become worn beyond readability. For example, Siscia often issued coins for Aurelian on which his neck was grotesquely long.

Most of our knowledge from papyri comes from excavations at Oxyrhynchus, a small town, sometimes garrisoned, in Egypt five days' journey to the south of Alexandria, so that delays might occur in reporting events. The town was watered by artificial canals, was the capital of the nineteenth *Nome* of Lower Egypt (Upper Egypt was divided into its own *Nomes*), and a large amount of official business was recorded there. Huge numbers of official documents were taken periodically from the town and simply dumped in the desert, where the sun and aridity preserved them until they were rediscovered in the nineteenth century. The canals dried up about the time of the Arab invasions of the seventh century, and Oxyrhynchus was essentially abandoned.

The records are frequently dated, always according to the Egyptian system where a year runs from 29 August, rather than the Latin system where the year starts on 1 January. The papyri confirm or reveal the names of some of the governors of Aurelian, among other information relevant to his reign. The extent of literacy within the Roman world is one of the most remarkable features attested by the papyri, and confirmed by the number of graffiti found in the ruins of Pompeii. It is evident that official meetings and legal matters were minuted, and that government proclamations were distributed widely in the form of hand-written copies.

The records of history were everywhere for the Romans. It is, perhaps, worth emphasizing here how reliable Roman historians are in general. Modern archaeology may sometimes amend the details of what we read in the ancient texts, but it is unusual indeed to have to make substantial changes to the historical record on the basis of

recent discoveries. This observation may be applied, in particular, to the Augustan Histories, despite their supposed fictional nature. For example, my 1932 edition of these histories has a footnote that three of six titles allegedly claimed by Aurelian, including *Sarmaticus Maximus*, had not been verified. Yet *Sarmaticus Maximus* has been found on one inscription, although its authenticity has been disputed. To take another example, the government position entitled *corrector*, which was once thought to be an anachronism in the Augustan Histories, is now known from new inscriptions to have been extant when the Histories cite it.

I have also consulted Philip Parker's substantial book *The Empire Stops Here*.¹¹ He is a former editor of *The Times Book List* (including books of ancient history), and was commissioned to tour the Roman towns and fortresses (or their ruins) in the provinces that comprised the old Roman frontiers – a somewhat arbitrary commission since the frontiers moved between the early Imperial period and the middle Byzantine era. However, Parker has personally toured these ancient sites and has evidently visited many of the dedicated museums at the ruins, which furnish more information than one could obtain from any general book of archaeology. Parker's detailed accounts must be the nearest modern equivalent of an 'ancient source' that we can hope to find today.

Finally, no mention of classical Roman history would be complete without an acknowledgement of Gibbon's masterly *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*,¹² published in several volumes of which the first appeared in 1776. Gibbon was the earliest historian to provide a complete account in English of the later part of the Roman Empire using all available sources in Latin, Greek, French, German, Arabic and Syrian, including many rediscovered during the Renaissance two to three centuries previously. He produced his narrative with such total command of his native language that the *Decline and Fall* was recognized within his lifetime as a classic, not only of history but also of literature, a position that it has never forfeited. Further, although inevitably later discoveries have rendered some of his historical details inaccurate, the broad sweep of his story remains substantially correct. Only his treatment, as a self-confessed non-believer, of the rise of Christianity, and his unenthusiastic account of Rome's successor, the Byzantine Empire, is criticized today. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* continues to be arguably the single most readable narrative of later Roman history for the layman today.

Marching rates

It was the French author Homo¹³ who first introduced the concept of using standard army marching rates to try to establish where Aurelian must have been at certain times. The procedure is particularly effective for this emperor, since he spent most of his rule on campaign, marching from one end of the empire to the other. Saunders¹⁴ has refined Homo's method, using standard marching rates for the Roman army of about 13 miles (21 kilometres) per day (including baggage train), a figure thought by others to be also representative of marching rates for Alexander the Great and medieval armies. Clearly, if Aurelian's army could not normally exceed a pace of 13 miles per day, then it cannot be expected to have reached a destination 520 miles (840 kilometres) away in fewer than forty days, although it may well have required longer.

Limes

The Latin word *limes* (genitive form *limitis*) had the original meaning of a crosspath between fields. Thence it became widely used to mean a path or, more commonly, a boundary; hence the English word 'limit'. Thereafter the word commonly describes a frontier, particularly of a province. The frontiers were lined with forts by the third century, and hence *limes* in a modern context has come to mean a 'fortified frontier'. Original Roman usage in the second and third centuries seems to denote simply a demarcated boundary; in the fourth and fifth centuries, a frontier area or an area controlled by a *dux* (duke) near the frontier.¹⁵ For convenience, I have used the modern definition.

Translations

All the translations from Latin into English for quotations were made by the author. Translations from Greek are attributed in footnotes for each chapter.

Dates

All dates mentioned here and in the main text are AD unless specified otherwise.

Nomenclature

It is easy to use modern names for geographical features, such as countries, rivers and mountains, which will have altered little over the centuries, but the naming of Roman towns presents a problem. Some have disappeared in the last 2,000 years, and have no modern equivalent. I have followed convention in naming Roman provinces, cities and towns generally with their original Latin names, with the

modern name added in brackets where appropriate.¹⁶ The names of emperors also follow conventional usage, for example 'Aurelian' and not 'Aurelianus', 'Caracalla' and not 'Caracallus' or 'Bassianus' or 'Marcus Aurelius Antoninus'.

Chapter One

The Crisis of the Third Century

Septimius Severus

The beginning of the third century AD (by modern reckoning) must have seemed to hold no fears for the peoples of the Roman Empire, nor for their rulers. The current emperor, Septimius Severus, admittedly had seized power in 193 on the pretext of avenging the emperor Pertinax, appointed by the Senate and murdered soon after by the Praetorian Guard that was supposed to protect him. The Praetorian Guard had then auctioned rule of the empire to the highest bidder, and it was Severus' army that had deposed the winner of the auction. Severus himself showed scant regard for the Senate, but he was a strong ruler who guarded Roman territory zealously.

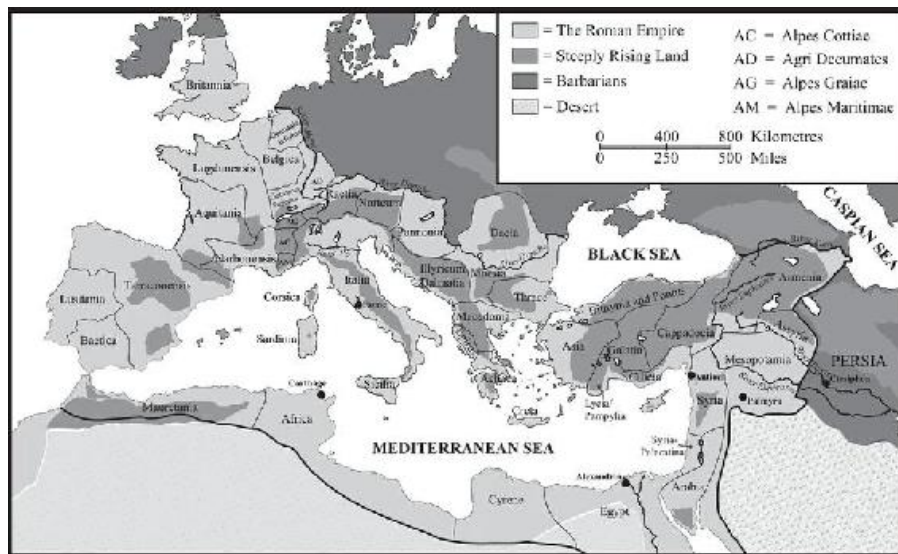
The limits of the Roman Empire had been set largely by the emperor Hadrian (117–138), using as far as possible natural frontiers that were easy to defend. These were the oceans to the west and, less obviously, the wide banks of the Rhine in Germany, on the north-eastern frontier of the empire, and the Danube, on the mid-eastern frontier. A line of fortified walls, *limes*, guarded the gap between the upper Rhine and upper Danube. Hadrian's own wall secured the northern frontier of the province of Britain, whilst the trans-Danube province of Dacia was shielded by mountains. The Sahara Desert protected the southern flank of the African provinces that were, in those days, far more fertile for agriculture than they are today. To the east, Asia Minor was shielded by the Black Sea, but the defence of Syria posed something of a problem. To the north-east, a long, curved arm of the wide river Euphrates provided another natural defence line. To the south-east, the Arabian Desert afforded some protection, but on the other side resided the formidable Parthian Empire in Persia. Previously this eastern frontier had tended to fluctuate, with both empires operating through client buffer states that had a propensity to change sides; nevertheless, simple diplomacy usually afforded security here too. Severus expanded Roman territory somewhat in the Middle East, by retaking the old Roman province of Mesopotamia from the Parthians, but in 198 reacted to renewed Parthian aggression by seizing the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon and reducing it to ruins. Severus also reorganized the Roman army, raising three extra legions, reinforcing the borders and creating for the first

time a strategic legionary reserve stationed in northern Italy. He recruited heavily from the provinces to increase the number of auxiliary legions.

Yet, in little more than a generation, the Roman Empire was to begin its descent into chaos, wracked by civil wars and barbarian invasions, and with its currency ruined by repeated debasement.

When Severus died in 211, his son Caracalla became emperor and quickly cemented his position by taking the precaution of murdering his co-emperor, his brother Geta. Caracalla extended Roman citizenship to all free men within the Roman Empire (212, or perhaps 213), largely to increase the tax base, with unintended side effects. The legions were manned by Roman citizens, but the provincials could volunteer for the auxiliary forces, when they would receive full citizenship after discharge at the end of twenty or twenty-five years. One effect of Caracalla's extension of citizenship was therefore to remove the incentive for ambitious provincials to join the army, and it is likely that the standard of recruits from the provinces declined. The distinction between regular legionaries and auxiliary troops was marked now by their standards of training and equipment.

The monstrous personal behaviour of Caracalla soon saw him assassinated. Within a year the undistinguished successor emperor Macrinus, widely believed to have arranged the death of Caracalla, was killed in battle with troops loyal to Bassianus, a grand-nephew of Severus' wife. Bassianus introduced an eastern variant of Sun worship (of the god Elagaba) to Rome, and changed his name to Elagabalus. After the murder of Elagabalus, a latter-day Nero, by his own scandalized household troops, the last emperor of the Severan dynasty was the virtuous Severus Alexander, who donned the purple toga of the emperor in 222 at the age of fourteen. He was ably assisted by first his grandmother and then his mother. Alexander's biggest problem was that of his troops. Unlike his Severan predecessors he had not raised their pay, excepting the traditional donation whenever a new emperor came to the throne, and now he sought to curb their propensity to make new emperors by increasing the power of the Senate. When Alexander led a new army against the resurgent Alamanni tribe near the Rhine in 234 his troops became mutinous. Alexander spent a year trying to reorganize the army but one of his own staff, C Julius Maximinus, started a riot that resulted in the death of Alexander and his mother (235). Maximinus then declared himself emperor.



Roman Provinces in AD 211.

The peace and civilization of Alexander's reign would appear in later years to be a haven of tranquillity separating the iron rule of Severus and the catastrophes that would follow after the death of Alexander. Across the Rhine and Danube, savage tribes were beginning to eye the Roman world with jealousy. To the east, a new Persian regime was stirring. Within the Roman Empire, marginalized generals felt that they too could make good emperors.

The barbarian menace

The Romans never understood the extent of the menace posed to their frontiers by the barbarians beyond it. Early emperors had hoped that they might in due course conquer all of Germany with its wild tribes, but for various reasons this was never done. Probably the conquest and maintenance of Roman rule appeared far to exceed any likely benefits from such distant and inhospitable lands; Britain had previously set an unpromising example. Moreover, usurpers tended to rebel against long-absent incumbent emperors. Yet strangely the Romans appear to have made little effort to send teams of explorers into Germany to find out what lay beyond, although we know of expeditions to find the source of the Egyptian river Nile and even into India. India came into prominence after discovery of the Monsoon winds connecting the Persian Gulf and that country in the first century AD.

Upheavals in distant China, with which the Romans had no direct contact, were forcing tribes of barbarian hunter-gatherers to drift westwards across Russia. The conditions in the Russian steppes

induced each tribe to continue to migrate westwards, until finally they emerged in Germany and southern Russia, where they encountered the eastern and northern frontiers of the Roman Empire. There, they could only marvel at its civilization and envy its wealth – which was there for the taking. Gibbon¹ devotes several pages to a vicious attack on the vices of the barbarians: too lazy to farm or create wealth, too devoid of distractions to treasure peace, too ignorant of the alphabet, too willing to get drunk and too willing to embrace war as a means of providing purpose, excitement and the fruits of other peoples' labours. Attacking neighbouring tribes offered few opportunities to acquire riches. However, the civilized Roman world contained fabulous quantities of gold, silver, iron and gems, as well as textiles, pottery and herds of livestock.

The biggest menace was the Gothic tribe, which settled north of the Black Sea round about 170–230. Soon after, many of the Goths migrated to the lands north of the river Danube and began to send raiding parties into the Balkans. The withdrawal of Roman subsidies to some of the tribes in the 240s (see next chapter) precipitated massive invasions of plunder-seeking barbarians in the following decade. At some point towards the end of the third century the Goths split, for reasons unknown, into two separate groups: the Visi-Goths moved to the west, where they threatened the Rhine defences, whilst the Ostro-Goths remained north of the Danube. We should mention in passing that the illiterate savages knew little of their own histories and their tribal names are tangled irretrievably in the ancient literature, so that one writer will describe an invasion by the Scythians or the Goths whilst another attributes the same event to the Marcomanni or the Juthungi, and yet another describes the Alamanni or the Vandals or the Franks. The names seem to reflect different groupings of tribes of barbarians, with little other significance. Broadly speaking, the Goths/Scythians dwelt around the Black Sea and eastern Danube, the Vandals on the middle Danube, the Franks along the Rhine and the remainder along the upper Rhine or western Danube. Severus and Caracalla had already been required to beat off exploratory attacks by the Alamanni and Goths launched from across the Danube.

There were other wandering bands of nomads that had clearly established identities. One such was the tribe of Sarmatians, who dwelled in south-western Russia, north of the Danube, after migrating from Persia. The Sarmatians were characterized by their use of distinctive helmets and of cavalry, and had waged intermittent raids

against Roman territory for at least a hundred years previously. We will meet them again as they took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Gothic incursions to renew their own plundering attacks across the Danube.

An empire that has fixed frontiers that are menaced by external barbarians can protect itself in one of three ways.² 'Preclusive Security' means that the perimeter is heavily patrolled, and no enemy can get in. There is no central reserve of troops. This was the system created by Augustus and solidified by Hadrian. 'Defence in Depth' requires multiple lines of defence backed by a central reserve, and is the most costly option. If the perimeter defence is overrun, then isolated outposts remain to harass the enemy rear, while the enemy advance is checked by reinforcements arriving from other areas or from the reserve. 'Elastic Defence' intends that no particular area is defended. Potential invaders are deterred only by the knowledge that the mobile, main Roman army will smash them when they are encountered. This is the cheapest form of defence but is also the least desirable for those whom it is intended to protect, the civilians living close to the frontiers.

All these defensive systems were tried at one time or another by various Roman emperors, but there was never a systematic policy. The Roman army could never police the vast boundaries of the empire tightly; there would always be gaps through which raiders could slip despite the partial security afforded by stone walls such as those of Britain and the Rhine, and the fast-flowing rivers of the Rhine, Danube and Euphrates. The Romans could hope only to discourage such raids by a vigorous policy of crushing the invaders as they departed homewards burdened with loot, or by the occasional punitive expedition deep into the barbarians' own heartland beyond the Roman frontiers. The large number of independent kings meant that the Romans could not hope to stamp out the menace with a single decisive battle, nor would any treaty be held to bind all of the barbarian rulers.

The third option was often the only one available to a weak ruler or a usurper pressing his claims against the central authority, and is the type of defence that we shall encounter most frequently when considering the emperors of the third century. The standard formation of Roman troops had to be modified to provide rapid, mobile detachments ('vexillations') drawn from legions and auxiliary troops that could rush to a threatened area. However, walled cities provided

a good temporary defence against opponents too ignorant, or too impatient, of the techniques of siege warfare. The local citizens would retire behind the walls with all their farm animals in the face of a barbarian attack while sending messengers for legionary help.

Contact with the civilising influence of the Romans slowly made the barbarian tribes more appreciative of the softer side of life. The Romans had found previously that their knowledge of the secret for producing wines was a powerful trade weapon. The barbarians' only previous knowledge of alcohol was through the tedious and erratic process of dumping sugars, such as honey, and yeast-bearing fruits, into holes in the ground, where the ingredients fermented to produce a type of mead or beer. They appreciated particularly a goblet of red wine. Ultimately, many would choose to settle within the Roman frontier, where they must have maintained close contact with their kinsmen on the opposite side. Roman emperors therefore began a policy of settling defeated barbarians within the frontier Roman provinces, partly so they could make good the devastation that they had caused and partly to soften up their neighbours on the other side. Still the mass migrations of barbarians from the east continued and each successive tribe appeared to be more savage than the one adjacent to the Roman frontier, with the result that the nearest barbarians preferred always to flood into Roman provinces – and loot them – rather than face the tribes to their east.

It is difficult to say today at what point the barbarians from the east changed from being simple plunderers, who would return home after their forays for loot, to being predatory migrants who feared Rome less than the tribes behind them. The ancient writers were quite clear that the barbarians who attacked Rome during the third century AD were motivated by nothing more than simple greed. When those who returned home with their loot told tales of the fabulous wealth to be had for the picking within the Roman provinces, the lust of their neighbours was raised, precipitating new waves of pillaging. The sixth-century Gothic apologist Jordanes uses the feeblest excuses to 'justify' all the plundering and mayhem wrought by his rapacious ancestors.³

Modern research may have discovered a new cause for all these mass migrations. Analysis of tree-rings in the wood used to manufacture some 9,000 artefacts over the past 2,500 years has demonstrated increased climate variability from about AD 250 to 600 in the Roman world.⁴ This timescale coincides very closely with the

decline of Roman civilization. Equally, global temperatures, which began to rise in 200 BC, had reverted to the norm by AD 600.⁵ Up to this point, the weather in Italy had been unusually favourable, as evidenced by crop cultivation at higher altitudes in the mountains than is practicable today.

The Persians

Centuries previously, the Greek general Alexander the Great had conquered the Persian Empire of Darius. The successors to whom he had bequeathed his empire fought numerous internecine wars, until finally a Parthian, Arsaces, had rebelled and set up the so-called Parthian Empire that gained dominion over the other lands in the general area of what is now Iraq and Iran (Persia). The long-established Parthian monarchy, on Rome's eastern front, represented a formidable opponent but was also a civilization with which sensible negotiations could be conducted. The destruction of their capital Ctesiphon by Septimius Severus in 198 would have far-reaching consequences for Rome.

Some Persian nobles had remained dissatisfied with their position under Parthian dominion and one of them, Artaxerxes, fostered a rebellion in about 208, which spread at first almost unnoticed by the Roman world. Artaxerxes overthrew the last of the Parthian kings, Artabanus V, in three battles in 224. These actions initiated the new Persian 'Sassanid' dynasty under King Artaxerxes I (also known as Ardashir, 227–241) who subjugated the old Parthian dominions. However, the Parthians continued to cling on in Armenia. A later Roman historian would remark on the new king's mild temper that encouraged all his new subjects to support him. Artaxerxes placed the Sassanid capital at the rebuilt Ctesiphon, far to the south-east on the river Tigris and on the opposite east bank to the old capital of Seleucia that the Romans had first destroyed in 165. He built the new city of Coche in 230–240 on the west bank of the Tigris, opposite Ctesiphon, to replace Seleucia. Artaxerxes claimed sovereignty over all the former realms of Darius – and this meant he laid claim to the Roman-controlled eastern empire as far west as Greece. All the former peace treaties and agreements between Romans and Parthians were null and void, and the Persians invaded the Roman province of Mesopotamia in 230, where they tried to seize the Roman client city of Hatra and also the client state of Armenia, both semi-independent realms that acknowledged Rome's authority.

The Roman currency

The civil wars that brought Severus to power had caused high military expenditure, and the Roman mints had increased the output of silver coinage by the simple expedient of reducing the amount of silver that they contained. The process had, we must acknowledge, already begun during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–161) and slowly become worse. The silver content of the standard coin, the *denarius*, which had been roughly equivalent to one day's pay and had been of almost pure silver during the reign of the first emperor Augustus, was reduced to under 50 per cent, with the inevitable result that tradesmen now required more of them in exchange for their wares. The Romans do not seem ever to have quite grasped what causes inflation, although certainly they appreciated its consequences well enough. Severus himself recognized only too clearly the part that his legions had played in his accession to the emperor's throne. He raised their basic pay from 300 to 450 *denarii*, although a large part of this may have been simply to compensate for the rising prices caused by the debasement of the coinage. Caracalla also promised improved pay (675 *denarii*) to the soldiers, and he debased the silver currency deliberately, with the introduction of a new silver piece, the *antoninianus*, which was valued at two *denarii* but contained only five-thirds of their silver content.

Chapter Two

The Armies Choose the Emperors

Revolt of the legions¹

The death of the popular Alexander in 235 was widely acknowledged by the Latin historians as the end of a golden era and the beginning of the age of crisis. In the next fifty years more than sixty army generals would claim the imperial purple, backed by their armies. Virtually all would be murdered by their successors or during their uprisings. The seizure of imperial power would remain a regular occurrence even thereafter, despite attempted reforms by Diocletian, who tried to set up a formal line of succession, until later Christian emperors could claim their divine right to rule. Modern scholars, too, have traditionally accepted the same watershed date, while acknowledging that the upheavals that followed owed their origins to Augustus, who had first seized power violently and never acknowledged formally his own position as an imperial ruler.

Maximinus had hitherto been an unknown provincial, from Thrace in Greece, who had made a purely military career. He was renowned for his gigantic size and physical strength – he was also only semi-literate. Almost all the previous emperors, or usurpers, had been able to claim a distinguished senatorial background. The inability of Maximinus to do so ensured he was an outsider from the start of his rule. Immediately he had to quell two mutinies in his fellow Rhine legions, then he returned to the original, unfinished business and quashed the Alamanni before pacifying the Danube frontier (236–237). The Persians resumed their attacks on the eastern perimeter and finally captured the important cities of Nisibis and Carrhae in Mesopotamia during 237–238.

Maximinus had also promised to double the pay of the legionaries in order to secure their allegiance. This led to oppressive taxation and some African landowners rebelled. Then they tried to protect themselves from retribution by the appointment of the elderly African proconsul (Gordian I) and his more active son (Gordian II) as new emperors in 238, elevations that were recognized by the Senate that was still resentful of Maximinus. The two new emperors were killed within a month in a hopeless battle with the governor of Numidia, who was loyal to Maximinus. The elite African legions at once put to

flight the poorly armed rabble of the Gordians, who both died, but the Senate remained resolute, reappointed two of its own number as new emperors, mobilized the Praetorian Guard in Rome and adopted a scorched-earth policy against Maximinus as the tyrant marched towards Rome. Maximinus was murdered by his own famished army. Within one more month the Praetorians had disposed of the Senate's emperors in favour of their own candidate, Gordian III (238), a 13-year-old related closely to the earlier Gordians. The Senate deployed young recruits and gladiators against the Praetorian Guard, which took heavy losses in savage street fighting, and the battles resulted in the conflagration of a large part of the city of Rome.

The new Gordian, or his advisor, tried to behave as a good emperor and was fortunate to have the talented praetorian prefect Timesitheus effectively as his guardian and father-in-law from 241. In the east, Shapur I (241–272) had become the Persian king, and proclaimed himself at once as 'King of Kings. King of all Persia and non-Persia.' He had initiated fresh attacks on the Roman eastern provinces and seized Hatra, while still co-regent in 240, and it became clear that he was more interested in plunder than in empire building. Shapur relied on a policy of savage terrorism to force the luckless local inhabitants to yield to him at the first onslaught. The Greek historian Agathias informs us that Shapur was 'very wicked and bloodthirsty, quick to anger and cruelty, slow to mercy and forgiveness'.

Gordian and Timesitheus led a huge Roman army and fleet against Shapur, and the skilled prefect rapidly rolled up the Persian forces, finally inflicting a severe defeat on them near Rhesaena in 243. However, Timesitheus fell ill, or was poisoned, and died before the victory could be consolidated. His successor as praetorian prefect was Philip 'The Arab', who demanded of the army whether they wanted to be ruled by a child or by himself, previously the understudy of Timesitheus. The soldiers backed Philip, and Gordian was murdered in February 244; the Senate was told that he had died a natural death. Philip now ended the Persian war on fairly favourable terms, retaining most of Armenia and Mesopotamia but paying a large ransom to the avaricious Persian king, and then rushed back to Rome to secure his position against any other would-be pretenders. Shapur carved a rock monument to preserve for posterity his claim to have inflicted a defeat on Gordian and to have sent away Philip in humiliation.

Now emperor, Philip celebrated the thousandth anniversary of the foundation of Rome in 248 with the most magnificent celebrations

that had been seen for centuries. Although the Romans did not use our modern method of counting years BC and AD, they were perfectly capable of reckoning time in years backwards and forwards, relying predominantly on the dates of the annual consular appointments; alternatively by counting the years elapsed since the legendary foundation of Rome. In the same year there followed a succession of usurper emperors, little more than names, who were put up by their legions and were murdered one after another. Philip himself, who was already ill, lost his nerve and offered to resign but his military advisors kept their heads and took appropriate countermeasures. It was only when the general Decius, sent as *Dux Moesiae et Pannoniae* (C-in-C, Moesia and Pannonia) to recover the Balkans from pretenders, also rebelled that Philip had to head an army personally. Decius won the ensuing battle easily (249), killing Philip and his son, but the new emperor in turn had to face revolts in Thrace, Syria and at Rome. All were quickly put down.

Most of the short-lived emperors had sought to secure the frontiers before removing border troops in pursuit of their own ambitions but, probably taking advantage of the preoccupation of the Roman generals, the barbarians suddenly pressed hard on the Rhine and Danube frontiers. Decius had abandoned the Balkans to a massive incursion of Goths and other tribes, who ravaged Thrace as far as Philippopolis, and the new emperor was forced to rush back to the defence of the area. He won one battle, lost another and was finally killed in action with the Goths at Abrittus, in the province of Lower Moesia, after being lured into a swamp (251). Decius had already inflicted heavy losses on the Goths before his own death and that of his appointed successor, his son. Rumours spread that his general Gallus, who had taken no part in the battle despite being close, had enticed Decius into the marsh, where a hail of barbarian javelins destroyed the entire army stuck in the mud. Certainly Gallus then let the badly mauled Goths depart with all their plunder and a promise of a yearly cash payment, before rushing back to Rome as the new emperor. The promise of subsidies to the barbarians set a dangerous precedent. The bribes secured peace only from one tribe of Goths, while tempting others to seek similar largesse. It was the later withdrawal of these payments by firmer emperors that precipitated fresh incursions by those originally paid off, but blackmailers tend to raise their price anyway.

Onset of the plague (250–270)

The Romans had previously experienced bouts of plague (possibly the bubonic plague that would wreak such havoc in the Middle Ages) and the last serious outbreak had been brought back from the east by the returning armies of Lucius Verus in 167. However, a new, more virulent form, described by the ancient writers as the worst of historical times, had arisen from Ethiopia and was spreading throughout the Roman Empire. Contemporary accounts state that the effect was worst in northern Africa but by the reign of Gallus it had reached Rome, where up to 7,000 citizens died each day. Gallus earned popularity by ensuring that even the poorest victims were buried scrupulously to try to prevent further contagion.

The Christian writer Eusebius quotes a letter from the bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, revealing that the recipients of all ages (14–80 years) of free corn at Alexandria after cessation of the plague were only equal to middle-aged recipients (40–70 years) before the plague. Gibbon² used eighteenth-century mortality tables to demonstrate that this meant that some half of the population of the major city of Alexandria had died from all causes. If this figure can be applied across all of Roman Europe, then the plague must have exceeded the terrible Black Death of medieval times when ‘only’ one third of the population of Europe died. The effects on agriculture, trade and Roman military capability must have been devastating, quite apart from the human tragedy.

Indirect persecution of the Church

Decius’ brief reign had marked two unexpected events. Firstly, he himself was the first Roman emperor ever to die in battle with barbarians. Secondly, he had instigated – indirectly – a persecution of the expanding Christian Church. There had previously been short-lived attacks on Christians, beginning with Nero’s persecution when he sought scapegoats for the burning of Rome, but most had been initiated by over-zealous local governors.

The principal objection to Christianity, and to Judaism, from the Romans’ point of view was that both religions denied the existence of any other gods; neither would their adherents offer sacrifices to the *genius* (the ‘divine part’) of the emperor. At a time when barbarians were pressing on every Roman boundary and civil wars seemed to have become endemic, Decius decided that everyone in the Roman Empire must offer a sacrifice to the Roman gods and an oath to his *genius* in order to show their loyalty. Those who did so could walk free.

A particular feature of Decius' decree was that the Christians were *not* required to give up their faith, only to sacrifice to show that they acknowledged the emperor as ruler. Modern historians have rejected the Christian tradition that this was really a systematic persecution of the Church. It was merely rather an attempt to force at least some kind of common cohesion on the disintegrating Roman Empire. The persecution caused tremendous difficulty within the early Church, with whole communities making the sacrifice, whilst thousands of individuals were martyred for not doing so. The persecution ended with the death of Decius.

Valerian and Gallienus as joint emperors

The reputation of Gallus – supposed disloyalty to Decius, luxurious living and lethargy against the barbarians, coupled with plague and famine – ensured that he did not survive the first usurper put into the field against him. The Goths had invaded Illyricum and plundered every item stored outside a walled town, and even many that were within fortified cities. Aemilian, commander of the Pannonian legions, heartened his dispirited troops to tackle the invaders. Somewhat to their own disbelief, the legions managed a surprise attack upon a large force of barbarians and routed them. The victorious soldiers gladly saluted their general as the new emperor and all marched into Italy to confront Gallus. The latter's army counted its inferior numbers and the warlike spirit of the Pannonian troops, then murdered their own emperor. Aemilian's army in turn deserted him when one of Gallus' loyal generals, Valerian, arrived on the scene with a yet larger army from the upper Rhine. Thus it was that the patrician P. Licinius Valerianus (Valerian) succeeded to the purple in the year 253, backed by all the armies and the Senate. He would be the last emperor who had been simultaneously a senator and a general.

The ancient Sibylline Books had predicted that Rome would last 1,000 years. The millennial celebrations had already been held (248) and the anxious population of the empire, shaken by civil wars and battered by the Gothic incursions, fearfully awaited the worst. Then the barbarians poured across the frontiers.

Weakened by years of civil war, the few remaining frontier troops were in no position to withstand the onslaught of barbarian bands, exploiting the opportunity and fuelled by the expectations of the Goths whom Gallus had allowed to return home. There had always been pressure from across the Rhine, but now Rome was faced with the following invasions:

- Across the western Danube: Alamanni
- Across the middle Danube: Marcomanni
- Across the eastern Danube: Goths and Sarmatians
- Across the northern Rhine and Britain: Saxons (including sea pirates)
- Across the southern Rhine: Franks
- Across the Black Sea: Borani and Heruli tribes
- Across the Euphrates: Shapur with the Sassanid Persian hordes.

The resurgent Persians again invaded Mesopotamia in 252, ejected the Roman army on the Euphrates and besieged Nisibis in 254. They occupied all of Armenia, overran Syria and captured the great city of Antioch through treachery, perhaps in 252–253. Shapur gave the traitor the usual reward: death. The Romans were faced with that most awful of problems for military forces: simultaneous war on several fronts.

Recent events had shown the dangers to an incumbent emperor of allowing his generals to command large forces. Yet large forces had to be provided if the barbarian invasions were to be checked. Valerian tried a dynastic solution, appointing members of his own family both as principal army commanders and as successors-designate. With fire breaking out on every border, the elderly emperor appeared briefly in Rome in 253, where he appointed his son Gallienus as *Augustus* (joint emperor) with command of the northern armies, and tarried awhile to organize his forces to meet the most dangerous threat, the Persian forces of Shapur. Meanwhile, Gallienus, who was clearly no poltroon, moved at once in person to the Agri Decumates, the land between the upper Rhine and the upper Danube. Here the Alamanni hordes had been threatening to overrun the entire province of Raetia and beyond, but he crushed them in five campaigns (254–258; see also below). For this he was granted the title ‘Ruler of the Western Empire’, and several coins commemorate the victories: *Germanicus Max. V(ictor)* and *Restitutor Galliarum*. Coins also suggest that Gallienus additionally overcame the Carpi tribe in Dacia, north of the Danube. The eldest son of Gallienus, Valerian II, was appointed caesar (junior emperor) in 256, and remained as commander south of the Danube while his father was in Gaul. Valerian II died in about 258 from unknown causes.

In the Balkans, the Goths had devastated all of the province of Thrace as far south as Thessalonika by 254 or 255 (dates uncertain).

This encouraged other raiders to try their luck. At some point the town of Panticapeum in the Crimea was sacked, affecting the Roman grain supply. The Heruli and Borani tribes then made a seaborne attack, using flat-bottomed boats with poor seaworthiness and carrying perhaps twenty-five occupants each, from the Crimea to the Roman town of Pityus on the far-eastern coast of the Black Sea. The defenders, under a vigorous Roman governor, stoutly repelled the attack (c. 256), but in the following year the Borani returned with a new fleet, seized Pityus, then moved to the undefended southern coast of the Black Sea. The provincials had supposed that the Black Sea provided a bulwark against intruders, rather than a convenient access, and the wealthy town of Trapezus was taken by surprise, plundered and burned to the ground before the victorious Borani sailed home again.

The empire divided for defence

The Roman literature is curiously reticent about the movements of Valerian at this time, although we know that he had undertaken to defend Rome's eastern provinces. Persian attacks there in 253 were checked by the priest-king of the large Syrian city of Emesa, an hereditary ruler who promptly declared himself emperor. He was murdered by his own men as soon as Valerian arrived in 254. The real emperor must have moved next to Asia Minor in response to the Gothic harassments. Valerian and Gallienus split control of the empire in 256 or 257 so that each could concentrate on handling local incursions.

In the west, other invaders had burst in and Gallienus could not be everywhere at once. Franks descended upon Gaul and Spain in raiding parties of up to 30,000 men, during which a little-known military tribune called Aurelian would first establish his reputation. Some of the Franks even reached northern Africa; others devastated the Spanish city of Tarraco so effectively that the Spanish priest Orosius could discern the marks of the passage 200 years later. The key defence area of the Agri Decumates, the weak gap in the frontier between the rivers of the Rhine and the Danube in which had been placed many forts and fortified walls, was also overrun by the Alamanni peoples, and would later be abandoned by the Romans.

Combined Alamanni and Juthungi tribesmen swept into Italy across the Brenner Pass in 258. Gallienus was at this time quartered north of the Alps so that Rome herself lay undefended. With praiseworthy energy, the Senate armed all the troops present in the city, recruited

civilians and mobilized gladiators from the training schools. The insurgent barbarians found themselves faced with a larger army than their own outside Rome, and decided to content themselves with plunder from northern Italy. The threat was so serious that Valerian felt moved to send reinforcements to his son. The intruders were bashed by Gallienus, hastening back to aid Rome, near Mediolanum (Milan) in 258 or 259.

The Senate's action had a sting in its tail. Gallienus was less than enthusiastic about its vigorous defence of Rome, fearing perhaps that one day the senators might mobilize a similar force against him. He therefore passed laws forbidding senators to command armies, or so we are told, although it is also likely that Gallienus intended simply to ensure that capable military commanders should command legions (see next chapter). Unfortunately, the dating and sequence of events by the ancient writers is so erratic that it is hard to tie together cause and effect.

When the Marcomanni threatened to reinvade Upper Pannonia at about the same time, Gallienus allowed some of them to settle within the province and he 'married' the king's daughter to ensure their loyalty. He was already married under Roman law. Gallienus may have hoped by this means to acquire a buffer through which other marauding barbarians would have to pass before threatening Roman lives. It would appear that it was at about this time that Gallienus also abandoned the defence of Upper Dacia,³ although the more southerly Lower Dacia was retained. The province of Dacia lay at this time entirely north of the river Danube. By now, the eldest son of Gallienus, Caesar Valerian II, had died, and Gallienus appointed his second son, Saloninus (258), as the replacement caesar currently based on the Rhine.

Christianity had shown explosive growth during the first half of the third century, and it had found adherents among all classes. Valerian had initially been very friendly with the Christians, many of whom could be found in his own palace at Rome, but, in the middle of this nightmare, he felt moved to follow the precedent of Decius and issued an edict against the senior Christian clergy stating that they must sacrifice to the Roman gods. Unlike the persecution of Decius, the edict was aimed explicitly at the new religion. The Christian literature for this period is much better dated than the pagan; the edict was promulgated in August 257. Eusebius⁴ quotes a contemporary belief that jealous 'Egyptian magicians' had induced the mild emperor to kill

the Christians, whom they perceived as rivals. Valerian extended the persecution against all Christians in 258. Penalties of slavery in the mines or confiscation of property were threatened against those who refused to sacrifice, with death as the punishment for recalcitrant clergymen.

Valerian and his main armies had moved into the Danube area. The Goths meanwhile mounted a full-scale naval invasion down the western coast of the Black Sea, while foot soldiers ran as fast as they could around the western shore (c. 257–258). They seized the city of Chalcedon in Asia Minor and many other cities. Nicomedia and Nicaea were put to the torch. These tribal advances into Greece threatened Valerian's communications, as well as the Roman cities, and a recurrence of the dreadful plague ravaged citizens and the army alike. Valerian sent a general to deal with the Goths, while moving east himself into the threatened province of Bithynia still suffering from the attentions of the Borani.

It had always been the Roman custom to defend the provincials against barbarians as a priority over attacks elsewhere by the armies of more civilized nations. After regaining the town of Nisibis in Mesopotamia from the Persians, Valerian had ignored the latter. Yet now the emperor was distracted by even worse news from the eastern frontier. The failure of the Romans to respond to Shapur's provocations and raids against individual cities induced the Persian despot to mount a full-scale invasion of Mesopotamia, perhaps in 260, when Nisibis was sacked again. News of the savagery of Shapur, who had renounced the civilized ways of his Parthian predecessors, seems to have precipitated the Romans into immediate action in that direction. Despite having an army weakened by plague, Valerian marched from Bithynia into Mesopotamia, probably lost a battle near Edessa (in the province of Cappadocia) while attempting to intercept a Persian anti-clockwise march into Syria, and asked for a truce with Shapur, for which a monetary payment would be handed over. News of a fresh barbarian invasion of Asia Minor may well have distracted the emperor.

Shapur insisted that progress of the negotiations required the personal presence of Valerian himself. The latter went alone, apart from a few guards, to the talks and was promptly seized by Shapur's men. Valerian was held captive until his natural death in 260. Rock reliefs and inscriptions near Persepolis (Iran), created by Shapur and rediscovered in 1936, show the emperor on his knees before the

mounted Persian king, who claims to have personally defeated and captured his enemy (the relief shows the king holding the wrist of the emperor)⁵; the inscription also shows several other victories by Shapur against thirty-seven walled Roman cities.

This left Gallienus as the sole emperor (260). However, other generals were reluctant to acknowledge the cultured intellectual who ruled the devastated provinces and commanded Rome's shattered armies. They began to rebel.

The thirty tyrants

The Romans never really developed the principle of a strong strategic army reserve, notwithstanding Severus' attempts fifty years earlier. Available troops would be deployed at the frontier of threatened areas, while the Praetorian Guard looked after Rome. In sixty to seventy years' time the emperor Constantine would create a formal frontier army and mobile field army to dash around to threatened areas, but there was no concept of 'defence in depth'. When any area was threatened, troops had to be rushed in from a neighbouring frontier, weakening that province's defences. But what if all frontiers were threatened?

By now, many of the Roman soldiers had strong ties to the areas in which they served. This was abetted by the military authorities as it would encourage the local forces to fight harder for their own families. The old idea of automatically shuffling soldiers from their own lands, to create a mobile army with no local ties, was largely disappearing.

With the frontiers threatened on all sides, the soldiers were very reluctant to allow themselves to be moved to other combat areas. Since the allegiance of the troops was sworn to their generals and to their emperor, and not to the Roman State, the easy way to avoid a forced move to another part of the empire was to appoint your own general as the new emperor. He, in turn, would authorize the soldiers to stay at home to guard their own territories. And, in the terrible crises and panics of the 'end of the Roman World', this was exactly what happened. The Latin chroniclers of the period tried to explain the phenomenon by a different means: Gallienus, they agree, had started his reign well but had then 'abandoned himself to wantonness and loosened the reins of rule with shameful idleness and despair' (Eutropius).

The Augustan Histories claim that thirty pretenders to the imperial throne arose during the confused period of Gallienus' reign.⁶ Although

this is certainly an exaggeration and even the Histories count two usurpers from irrelevant times, modern historians have identified at least nine serious rebellions, and that was quite enough with which to be contending. The pretenders of lesser armies faced a terrible dilemma when appointed emperor by their own soldiers, for the honour was often unsought: to decline and be murdered by one's own army in favour of a more accommodating officer; or to accept and be murdered by one's own troops when they were offered an amnesty by a more powerful general nearby who had remained loyal to the official emperor. In these blighted years, few had time to create official histories and the sequence of events becomes confused, but archaeology has managed to unscramble most of the disasters of this period from inscriptions and the evidence of coins.

First Ingenuus, governor of the province of Pannonia, south of the Danube, rebelled probably in 260, although some would place the revolt before the capture of Valerian earlier that year. Gallienus and his cavalry general Aureolus put him down. The recalcitrant army in Pannonia promptly installed another new emperor, but the local population arranged for his murder too, fearing that even the mildest of emperors was likely to exact bloody vengeance on a second rebellion in the same area within a year. Gallienus was severely wounded in the fighting.

Gallienus' young son, Saloninus, had been appointed as caesar at Colonia Agrippinensium (Cologne) in the middle-Rhine area, protected by the praetorian prefect Silvanus. When Silvanus asked the commander of the Rhine armies, Postumus, to hand over booty recovered from a Frankish raid, Postumus claimed that it had all been distributed to his own men. Unwisely, Silvanus persisted, and the Rhine army rebelled and besieged him at Colonia Agrippinensium. Gallienus had been wounded in the fighting with Ingenuus, so could not give aid, and finally the garrison surrendered, handing over Silvanus and Saloninus. Postumus ordered both killed, and set himself up as the emperor of the Gallic-Roman Empire (260), issuing coins from the Rhine army mint at Augusta Treverorum (Trier).

All the western provinces of Gaul, Britain and Spain seceded to join Postumus, as well as, briefly, the Danubian province of Raetia. Postumus guaranteed to protect their lands from barbarian incursions and also that he would not permit the spillage of a single drop of Roman blood against fellow Romans. The latter statement was probably intended to head off a counter-attack by the recuperating

Gallienus, who still had to contend with numerous barbarian invasions; a diversionary attack on Italy by Postumus would have been the last straw. It is unclear today to what extent Postumus' assurances – that he would not initiate a civil war against Rome – were trustworthy. However, he never did commence such a war, and he did honour his promise to defend the eastern frontier of Gaul against the barbarians. Nevertheless, Gallienus had lost the income from taxes, and also the armies, of the western empire as he struggled to deal with the other invasions. According to the 'Continuator of Dio', Gallienus challenged Postumus to single combat but the offer was declined.

The recent discovery of the 'Augsburg Altar' (at Augusta Vindelicorum, the capital city of Raetia), with its inscription,⁷ and of a hoard of precious metals, coins and gems in the former river bed from the old course of the Rhine, shows that there were serious disturbances from barbarian invasions that can be dated very tightly to AD 259–260, and that the pretender Postumus managed a significant victory over the barbarians in April 260, celebrated on the altar inscription. Augsburg is actually south of the Danube, within the territory of Gallienus, and it seems that Postumus must have chosen voluntarily to vacate the city thereafter. This did not save his name from being erased later from the inscription.

The Agri Decumates, the land between the upper Rhine and the upper Danube that now formed a buffer zone between Postumus, Gallienus and the barbarians, had been occupied earlier by the Alamanni. Faced with a potential three-way tussle to dislodge intruders, neither Postumus nor Gallienus felt inclined to make the attempt, with the result that this important weakness in Rome's frontier defences, the gap between the Rhine and Danube rivers, was abandoned forever to the Alamanni in about 261 or 263.

Rebellion in the east

It is not clear to what extent the Roman armies in the east had been defeated by Shapur, but the Persians were able to plunder at will in the eastern Roman provinces of Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia. The elderly general Macrianus and his deputy Callistus rallied the Roman soldiers, reorganized the Roman eastern fleet and checked Shapur's advance on the Cilician coast with a major battle that recovered much booty. The Romans then pushed the Persians all the way back to the Euphrates. Macrianus, who was old and lame, appointed his two sons as joint emperors and was joined by the provinces of Syria, Asia Minor

and Egypt. At a stroke, then, Gallienus had lost the wealth and the armies of the east to Macrianus and his sons, as well as the defections to Postumus from the west (260).

Economic collapse

The wars of conquest fought in earlier centuries by the Romans had resulted in massive inflows of gold, silver, precious gems and other booty that had combined to keep the armies sweet, general taxation low and economic confidence high. By the middle of the third century, the conquests had ended and the armies were used primarily to defend the frontiers – when they were not engaged in emperor-making. However, the armies still had to be paid, and they still expected their share of booty.

Wars were now being fought on Roman territory, and the spoils were those that had once belonged to the Roman people. The most common source of such treasure was to recapture it from barbarians who had previously seized it from the provincials, and we may assume that little was returned to the original victims. Some was used to pay subsidies to buy off, or even recruit, those same barbarians who had taken it in the first place. The wretched provincials were then taxed heavily to provide the pay for the legions. Their lands had been ravaged, resulting in loss of homes, crops and possessions; their routes to market were disrupted, the markets themselves deserted. The principal taxes of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the third century comprised a customs levy of 2–2.5 per cent, a tax on slave releases and on inheritances of 5 per cent, a capitation levy rather like a poll tax and a tax on land, which varied according to its quality and location. The inheritance tax for Roman citizens had been raised to 10 per cent by Caracalla when he made all free men citizens in 212. Somewhat surprisingly, the fixed-rate taxes were generally not increased in line with the inflation caused by the deterioration of the currency. Instead they were replaced increasingly by levies on goods-in-kind (the *annona*). The Roman treasury even used surpluses from such levies to pay for other goods, reverting effectively to barter.⁸

Weighing most heavily upon the rural peasants were the capitation and land taxes, both of which varied from area to area. In addition, the farmer had also to pay a rent to his landlord. The collection of taxes is known to have been inefficient, being irregular and often targeted at those who could not pay and thus placing a larger burden on those contributing. As taxation rose to support the army, and markets collapsed, the poorer farmers found it increasingly difficult to

pay their taxes. The easy solution was to abandon the farms, as there would be few willing purchasers of land with a crippling tax burden. There is ample evidence of the decreasing usage of farm land, especially that of marginal quality, during periods of disturbances. It is not surprising that brigands and pirates arose as a new menace from some of those newly displaced.

Debasement of the coinage

The coinage of the later Roman Empire provides a lot of information that would be otherwise unavailable.⁹ Chemical analysis tells us something about the issuing mint and the type of metal content gives a close assessment of the date when it was manufactured. The coin provides information about the emperor and from his portraiture we can see his physical appearance. The standard of engravature of images remained good throughout the later Roman period. The text on the coins tells us of the titles that the emperors assumed, and what values they judged to be important; often idealized, or simply wishful thinking, such as 'Happy the City of Rome' during a period of barbarian invasions.

The coins were pieces of metal stamped on both sides, generally of uneven size although attempts were made to standardize the weight of the piece. Unlike our modern flat currency, the Roman coins were convex in shape, particularly noticeable with the gold pieces. The metals comprised either gold, silver with a varying amount of base metal, bronze or copper. The gold coins were almost invariably of high metal quality and were called *aurei*, singular *aureus*. Initially the silver coin was also of high purity, and was called a *denarius*. Under Augustus one Roman pound of gold was pressed to give forty *aurei* and one pound of silver produced eighty-four *denarii*, but the emperor Nero (54–68) changed the output to provide forty-five *aurei* and ninety-six *denarii*, a ratio between gold and silver coins that remained unchanged, nominally, for more than 200 years. Although the ratio of gold to silver content of coins remained more or less as a constant throughout the imperial period, the values of brass and copper coins were linked to the *denarius* by a ratio that could be fixed by decree of the emperor. The base metal coins were employed essentially as tokens, rather like modern coinage, and were used for small change.

The Roman gold and silver coins were given the full monetary value of their metal content and relied on continuous production of gold and silver from mines scattered throughout the empire. Silver always possessed the lower value; consequently, silver coins circulated

more widely, putting strain on the ability of the mines to keep up with demand. An early fear was that the export of silver coins to India in exchange for perishable silks would bankrupt the empire ultimately, but the silver mines kept going until the end. It is unlikely that production could ever be greatly increased to meet sudden demand.

Gold coins are much scarcer to find than those of silver and it is often asserted that the reason is due to their high value and the fact that loss of a gold coin would result in a very careful search by its owner. Handling the gold coins (courtesy of the British Museum, London) shows that they are small and not actually very heavy, and their loss from a Roman purse would scarcely be more noticed than the loss of a valuable, latter-day £50 note from a modern purse. Who today, however poor, would waste time searching for a missing £50 note that had vanished who knows where outside the home? The shortage of rediscoveries of Roman gold coins can best be explained by their comparative uselessness in daily shopping. To buy a glass of wine or a pound of bacon with a gold coin would be rather like making the same purchases today with a £250 note, if such existed. It is likely that comparatively few gold coins ever circulated in the Roman world, relative to the silver currency. Since they were of high gold purity, surviving examples would have been melted down in medieval times to create new gold coinage.

The metal coins lacked the milled edges that we see on modern currency. Because they were larger than the stamp and comprised valuable metals, 'clippage' became a problem. Unscrupulous coin owners would shave off a small sliver of metal from the gold and silver coins before returning them to circulation. Repeated clippage caused the coins to shrink in size and thereby drop in value. Naturally, clippage was illegal and subject to severe punishment when detected, but usually it would be impossible to place the blame on the guilty party. However, simple weighing of the coin by traders served to reduce its purchasing value if clipped, and this must have had some deterrent effect.

Roman smelting for lead, copper and silver in Spain was on such a scale that it has left characteristic traces in the frozen ice cores of Greenland, to an extent not re-encountered until the Industrial Revolution.¹⁰ Yet the same evidence indicates a decline in the scale of smelting in each century after the first BC until the end of the Roman era. In addition, the north Dacian mines, which were the major non-Spanish source of silver, were lost in AD 258/9.

Thus the supply of silver was in decline throughout the imperial age and this alone may explain the debasement of the coinage. At the beginning of the imperial era, under Augustus, the silver *denarius* had a silver content of about 97 per cent. Shortages of silver led the mints to mingle in increasing quantities of base metals, so that by the time of Septimius Severus (193–211), the silver content had declined to some 75 per cent. By now the emperors had learned that, by reducing the silver content of the coin deliberately, they could keep the silver saved and insist that their subjects value the debased coinage as though it retained its original value – except for the payment of taxes. The emperors were not so foolish as to accept their own devalued coinage back in settlement of taxation unless at a steep discount.

The Roman rulers therefore discovered inflation the hard way. If the silver content of a *denarius* was one quarter of its original content, tradesmen demanded four times as many *denarii* for their goods. Equally, as the 97 per cent silver coins of Augustus had the same face value as the new debased coins, people hoarded the early coins, and buried coin hoards rediscovered in recent years show clearly the preference for retention of earlier, better quality issues. A curious feature of this debasement was that, as the silver content of the *denarius* fell, the weight of the gold *aureus* declined proportionately to maintain the gold:silver value ratio, although the gold content remained very high. The fiscal ratio of gold to silver in coins finally collapsed, when the ‘silver’ coins contained virtually no silver.

Inflation induced by the debasement of the currency did not matter to the Roman population as much as it would today. Very few people of the Roman Empire received salaries for their work. In an agricultural economy, most people received agricultural products – vegetables, milk, cattle and the like. Money was used only as a convenient medium of exchange. Where a farm labourer might once have sold some of his surplus produce for one good *denarius*, and then bought his requirements with the same coin, now he simply shuffled four *denarii* for the same series of transactions.

The army, however, was paid with debased money, so it was customary for emperors to provide gold coins and silver bullion as extras to keep the soldiers content. The interminable civil wars of the third century must have greatly accelerated the debasement of the silver coinage, as usurper emperors with limited or no access to the silver mines would have been forced to reduce the silver in the coinage in order to pay their troops the increased bounties promised

for their support. Ironically, it was the demands of the armies for more pay that led them to receive decreasingly valuable money, a self-perpetuating cycle. A papyrus has survived from Egypt, from the governor representing two of the third-century pretenders, telling reluctant local bankers that they must accept the tyrants' new, and virtually worthless, coinage at full value – or else.¹¹

It was the emperor Caracalla (211–217, also known as M. Aurelius Antoninus) who deliberately started the downward process when he increased the legionaries' pay from 450 to 675 *denarii*. He now introduced his *antoninianus*, a coin with a face value of two *denarii* but a silver content roughly equal to one and two-thirds of the *denarius* (215). The name *antoninianus* is known only from the Augustan Histories, where the actual phrase used is *argenteus antoninianus*. By the reign of Severus Alexander, the silver content had fallen to about 50 per cent. Thereafter there was a speedy collapse in quality. As later emperors reduced the silver content of both *denarius* and *antoninianus*, the former had ceased to be struck in large volumes by 244 and simply dropped out of the financial system during the reign of Gallienus. The *antoninianus* was now struck over the face of the surviving *denarii*. The sudden shortage of silver is sometimes attributed to exhaustion of the silver mines, but Gallienus had in any case lost the output of many of the empire's mines with the defection of Britain and Spain to Postumus, although he retained those of Pannonia and Dalmatia. Up to this point the debased 'silver' coinage had at any rate retained a satisfactory appearance, but now even this degenerated. By the reign of his successor, Claudius, the *antoninianus* had shrunk to a weight of just three grams, of which only 2 per cent was silver in the form of a wash over the surface of the coin that wore off rapidly.



The Balkan Provinces.



Asia Minor and the East.

The disruption of routes by barbarian incursions and by brigands meant that the government mints had to be placed close to those who most required the coins, namely the armies. The process of moving the mints began under Valerian and was never fully reversed, although later emperors might move mints a little farther away from troops whose loyalty was suspect.

Chapter Three

The Start of Recovery

Reaction of Gallienus¹

The year 260 represented the nadir in Roman fortunes. Valerian had been captured and was now dead. His son Gallienus ruled alone, and was widely reviled for not having come to the rescue of his father. Macrianus and his sons controlled the eastern empire, while Postumus had defected with the empire of the west. In the year 261 there were three pairs of Roman consuls, those of Gallienus, of Macrianus and of Postumus. Shapur was still brooding on his defeats. Two pretenders had revolted within the limited area (Italy, Africa and the Danube provinces) over which Gallienus' writ still ran and all the time barbarians roamed freely over the provinces, plundering, killing and burning. According to an anonymous mid-third-century writer, the empire was 'like an ill and rotting body, or like a botting horse ... in total confusion'.²

However, desperate situations require desperate remedies, and Gallienus decided to appoint all his military commanders on the basis of their abilities, rather than of their civilian rank. This meant that Roman senators, who were accustomed to receiving key military posts, no longer were considered; indeed it appears that Gallienus showed scant sympathy for the Senate, a policy that did not endear him to later writers of Latin history, who were themselves mostly drawn from the senatorial classes.

His energy and courage could hardly be disputed, yet the author(s) of the Augustan Histories can scarcely pen a word about Gallienus without spitting at his name. The same source is willing to acknowledge the emperor as a talented orator, poet and artist, and that he was 'very clever'. Clearly Gallienus, a highly cultured man, was held personally responsible for all the disasters that had befallen the State.

Yet Gallienus did not despair, and we may observe that he did simply what he could, reacting to each emergency according to its priority. Christian writers of this and succeeding periods were noticeably kinder to Gallienus than the pagan Latin writers, while Gallienus favoured the new religion without going so far as to become a convert himself. Valerian's persecution of the Christians had been

rescinded by Gallienus as soon as he possessed sole authority and Christians were now permitted to join the army and were not required to worship the *genius* of the emperor. The Church had often declared previously that it was willing to offer up prayers *for* the emperor, but not *to* the emperor. One might guess that, whereas Decius and Valerian had sought to unite the empire by causing everyone to swear allegiance to the Roman gods, Gallienus tried to achieve the same objective by not antagonizing wantonly an important section of the community. Eusebius quotes the relevant edict and it is interesting to note that Gallienus claims never to have intended to interfere with Christian worship:

The Emperor Caesar Publius Licinius Gallienus Pius Felix Augustus to [named Christian bishops in Egypt]. I have ordered the bounty of my gift to be declared through all the world, that they may depart from the places of religious worship. And for this purpose you may use this copy of my rescript, that no one may molest you. And this which you are now enabled lawfully to do, has already for a long time been conceded by me. Therefore Aurelius Cyrenius, who is the chief administrator of affairs, will observe this ordinance which I have given.³

Gallienus drove back an invasion of Upper Pannonia in about 260 or 261. However, the year 261 began poorly when his general Aureolus rebelled against Gallienus. He was besieged and, extraordinarily, pardoned. Now Gallienus took steps to control the rot in the east. Macrianus and one of his sons had advanced as far as the Balkans, but both were stopped and killed by one of Gallienus' generals, Domitianus, a subordinate of the cavalry commander Aureolus. Another general, Theodotus, may have put down a revolt by one Aemulinus in Egypt. Gallienus then appointed Septimius Odaenathus, the energetic, hereditary ruler of the desert town of Palmyra, as the supreme commander (*Dux Orientis*) of all Roman troops in the east, a position with no clearly defined responsibilities to the legitimate emperor. Later Latin writers seem to be unanimous that this was the emperor's most significant achievement.

Palmyra⁴

Palmyra (pronounced Palm-y-ra) was a trading city placed on an oasis in the middle of the Arabian Desert to control the most southerly camel route trading between the Roman Empire and the exotica, such as perfumes and spices, of the east, principally from Persia and India via the river Euphrates. It was ideally situated some 90 miles (145

kilometres) south-east of Antioch and about 60 miles (96 kilometres) from the river Euphrates. The city had been known as Tadmor ('City of Dates') since about 1800 BC, had been a trading post since the time of Alexander the Great, and had subsequently been controlled by the Nabatean peoples, once nomads of the desert, but now settled by the first century AD. It had been raided in 41 BC by Mark Anthony's cavalry seeking plunder. Under the emperor Tiberius, Palmyra had become a Roman subject state and the Romans had reduced banditry and piracy in Nabatean lands. The main Nabatean kingdom had been annexed by the Romans in 106, probably in order to take over control of the caravan routes. The Romans made good use of the ancient Nabatean watchtowers and other fortifications, as well as constructing new defences. Now it was their turn to mind the desert and its wandering tribes.

Septimius Severus had made Palmyra a Roman colony, although the emperor was willing to concede that the local king ruled in his name. This was a common arrangement in the eastern provinces; Herod the Great provides a better-known example. By exacting tolls on the caravans that passed, the city had reached a high degree of wealth and even supplied archers and cavalry as auxiliaries for the Roman legions. A decree of 137 indicates the taxes to be paid by passing caravans (the hardy camel being the principal beast of burden), paid mostly in kind. Cargoes of wheat, wine, olive oil and other staples appear to have predominated, but by now there were many ships returning from India and 'Ethiopia' with their cargoes. Silk from China was always popular in the Roman Empire, and the 'Annals of the Han Dynasty' recognize trade with Rome from about 166.

The size of Palmyra, now in ruins, measures about 3.8 square miles (10 square kilometres). This makes no allowance for the nearby oasis, which still exists, and the fertile, irrigated land that once surrounded the city. The surviving buildings are protected by the remains of strong walls that could certainly withstand a siege by a professional army, although the main threat was probably from nomadic desert tribes. Although much of the stone of Palmyra has survived, unfortunately the same cannot be said of the brick that once created the buildings within the stone skeleton. The city was oriental in style and was at that time populated predominantly by Bedouin/Nabatean Arabs although, as a key trading outpost, it must have contained many foreigners. Its culture was certainly very cosmopolitan. Private houses were filled with a mixture of Roman mosaics and Persian carpets; its

inhabitants wore Roman-style robes or Persian-style trousers. There was a variety of religions practised.

The most important structure was, and is, the fabulous Temple of Bel (not a Sun god, contrary to most accounts) with its classical facade of Greek columns and sloping roof. The temple was built on an earlier religious site, and was surrounded by a huge courtyard measuring 230 by 224 yards (210 by 205 metres). It was dedicated in AD 32. Next to the courtyard ran the 'Great Colonnade', 1,312 yards (1,200 metres) long in the direction west to east, and lined with 1,500 Corinthian columns. The colonnade passed through the official quarter of the city, with its public baths and theatres, before reaching the 'Tetrapylon', a magnificent monumental arch comprising four groups of four massive columns, on which some of the original pink granite can still be seen. After reaching the arch, the avenue then changed direction 15 degrees to the north, apparently to protect the symmetry of the view in all four directions from the Temple of Bel, and ran another 547 yards (500 metres) to the city gate. A stunning Roman-style theatre also remains in a good state of preservation.

Outside, the Valley of the Tombs still remains nearby, with its unique tomb towers (some over five storeys high) and crypts. The tombs were used to bury generations of wealthy Palmyrenes who, while alive, came to feast with their ancestors before being interred when their own times had come. Much of our knowledge of Palmyrene life derives from the sculptures and artwork that decorate the tombs. Some of the tombs had even been rented out.

P. Septimius Odaenathus had been the ruler of Palmyra since the 240s, as we know now from the evidence of a recently discovered inscription. His family came to sudden prominence, perhaps as successful merchants or after being driven there from Persia by Shapur. By 252, he had become the 'Chief of Tadmor', according to an inscription. He was a member of the Roman Senate and had been awarded the honorary *Ornamenta Consularia* by Valerian in 257 or 258. From the 260s, he becomes titled in the local language as 'King' (where he is also named Septimius Vorodes), in Latin as *Procurator Augusti ducenarius* (an administrator of the emperor) and in Persian as 'fort commander'. He had at least eight statues in the grand colonnade of Palmyra.

Although described in the literature as the *Dux Orientis*, the name never appears in inscriptions, although he received the Greek title *strategos* of the entire east from Gallienus, or in Latin equivalent

corrector, a Roman title for the governor of certain provinces. Awkwardly poised between a great Roman Empire to their west, that seemed to be falling into decay, and a resurgent great empire to their east, the Persian, the Palmyrenes had to play their cards carefully so as not to antagonize their imperial trading partners. Odaenathus had cautiously sent camel-loads of gifts to Shapur on the pretext that the Persian had 'greatly surpassed the Romans', but was rocked by the reply of the self-styled 'King of Kings', who dumped all the gifts unceremoniously into the Euphrates:

Who is this Odaenathus that he thus dares to write to his lord? If he hopes to reduce his punishment, let him fall prostrate before the foot of my throne with his hands tied behind his back. If he hesitates, rapid destruction shall be poured on him, his people and his country.⁵

The contrasting actions of Shapur and Gallienus set the seal on Odaenathus' loyalty. It is easy to imagine that Rome would have been his preferred choice anyway, considering Shapur's reputation as a bloodthirsty, merciless and cruel despot. Besides, Palmyra's economic interests lay with the Romans, as Shapur had blocked the caravan routes trading from east to west. Thus encouraged by self-interest and by Gallienus, Odaenathus quickly suppressed Macrianus' surviving son and his general Callistus at Emesa, and thereby restored nominal Roman rule over all the east. Yet only nominal rule. In practicality, Odaenathus was able to rule the east as his personal fiefdom, although there is no evidence that he and Gallienus ever quarrelled. Indeed, remarkably among these years of pretenders and usurpers, Odaenathus always acknowledged Gallienus as the true emperor, a fact attested by his coins. The Palmyrene's success – indeed, his survival – shows considerable political skill in these turbulent times.

In autumn 262 Gallienus was able to celebrate his decennalia (beginning of tenth year of rule) at Rome with appropriate celebrations. There is no doubt that Gallienus intended to deal with the usurper, Postumus, in the western Gallic Empire. Gallienus won a battle against Postumus in Gaul in 263 but Aureolus failed to follow it up, although it is probably at this time that the defected province of Raetia returned indefinitely to the central authority. Postumus sent for reinforcements from his frontier troops on the Rhine, and even employed German mercenaries, but suffered a second defeat. He retired to a town (unknown) where he was besieged, but Gallienus was wounded by an arrow and had to be taken back to Rome. Once again he was distracted by barbarian invasions, and there seems now

to have been an unwritten agreement that Gallienus and Postumus would leave each other alone.

The Goths were again overrunning most of Asia Minor in 262–264, and Gallienus and his armies hastened to the rescue. The fabulous Temple of Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus, which was at least five centuries old and had been accidentally destroyed, then rebuilt, on several occasions in the past, contained the riches of generations of worshippers and had always been respected by previous invaders. This was the temple visited by St Paul in the ‘Acts of the Apostles’. The Goths sacked the temple, which was ruined and never restored. The remains can still be seen in Turkey, and are quite surprisingly small to those accustomed to the giant size of Christian cathedrals. There has been considerable dispute about the precise date of its destruction, some favouring the date given here, others preferring to place the destruction during the Gothic invasions of 257–258, when Valerian took the necessary countermeasures; yet others prefer to place the date during the third great Gothic onslaught of 267–268.

Gallienus personally led the armies that threw out encroaching Goths from Cappadocia, an eastern province north of Syria, perhaps in 262 or 264. Gallienus recaptured various cities and then moved to the neighbouring province of Bithynia, where a rebellion of troops who had been seeking a strong local emperor to deal with the marauding Goths was itself squashed. The Augustan Histories record that Gallienus faced a rebellion at Byzantium, later better known as Constantinople, and suppressed it by offering an amnesty and then breaking the terms of the surrender and massacring all the nobles and many of the population. However, the Greek historians remark on the clemency that Gallienus always showed to his enemies, so this may be another example of the blackening of the emperor’s name by Latin writers. The Augustan Histories claim that another rebellion in Isauria was put down by his generals. No other source supports this claim.

The ruler of Palmyra, Odaenathus, conducted a series of campaigns during 262–264 against the Persians, starting by hitting their forces retreating along the Euphrates after their earlier defeat by Macrianus. The Palmyrenes recaptured northern Mesopotamia and perhaps Armenia too. While Odaenathus was doubtless following a personal agenda, reducing the Persian threat to his own realm, he had clearly also done the Roman State signal service. Even if he had only kept the Persians at bay it would have been enough and Gallienus was glad to award his ‘subject’ the title of *Imperator*, indicating ambiguously a

successful general in Rome's foreign wars – or an emperor. Gallienus took the opportunity to display a magnificent Triumph in 264 to celebrate Odaenathus' early victories over the Persians. The event was marred by a number of Roman jokers who examined the face of each Persian captive in the triumphal procession, to discover whether they could find the unavenged emperor Valerian.

Again the light forces of Odaenathus punched into the Persians (c. 267) taking Mesopotamia up to, but not including, the Persian capital city, Ctesiphon. However, Odaenathus, despite having appropriated for himself the title of 'King of Kings', did not live to enjoy his successes. A palace intrigue, doubtless concerning which side he was really taking (although it may have arisen over a trivial dispute during a wild beast hunt), resulted in Odaenathus and his successor, his eldest son, being murdered by court officials at Palmyra in 267 or 268. The 'Anonymous Continuator of Dio' claims that the death of Odaenathus had been directed by Rufinus, governor of the Roman province of Arabia. This presumably refers to Cocceius Rufinus, governor from 261-262, but the tale is confirmed by no other source.⁶

The death brought the widow and second wife of Odaenathus, a talented and aggressive woman named Septimia Zenobia, into power. Since rule by women was never a very agreeable state for ancient populations, Zenobia appointed a respected team of counsellors to provide advice; even so, she continued to rule through her infant son Vaballathus (in the Palmyrene tongue, Wahballah; in Greek, Athenodorus). Vaballathus was Odaenathus' second son. Gallienus seized the opportunity to try to overthrow the new dynasty through his new praetorian prefect Heraclianus, but the attempt failed; the Augustan Histories provide the sole evidence that Zenobia's army defeated Heraclianus. There may be here a muddled confusion between the hazy and unsubstantiated tales of Roman intervention by Rufinus and Heraclianus. If there is any basis in fact, we may guess that this piece of opportunism soured relations between Rome and Zenobia, who built for herself a new city, also named 'Zenobia' (modern Halabiye), on the river Euphrates, 190 miles (300 kilometres) north-east of Palmyra. The new city was sited next to the Euphrates between two hills, its many defensive walls rising to the hilltops. The river itself was compressed by the proximity of the hills, and rushed with considerable force sometimes almost up to the battlements.

Gallienus improves the Roman army

Gallienus improved the officer classes and between 264 and 268 he

created a heavy cavalry force organized in squadrons each of 500 men. The Roman army had hitherto comprised predominantly infantry, although light cavalry had been recruited from the provinces as attachments to the legions. The latter had proved to be inadequate against well-armoured opposition. The new unit consisted of heavily armoured cavalry to counter similar attire worn by Persian horsemen – not only the rider but also the horse bore the armour, as a protection against the proficient archers who could be found in the east. There were also light mounted troops drawn chiefly from the eastern provinces, as well as a body of Dalmatian cavalry. The formations were intended to serve both as a strike force and as a central reserve, reintroducing Severus' concept of a defence in depth. They were based accordingly at first at Mediolanum (Milan), which served now as a pivotal point in a key defence line connecting the towns of Aquileia, Verona, Mediolanum and Ticinum. After the loss of the Agri Decumates, the new bulwark provided the only strong hindrance to a barbarian attack on Rome herself.

The new mobile army, totalling some 30,000 men, was very powerful; therefore it had to be headed by the best and most loyal officers. The initial command was delegated to the general Aureolus, who was expected to guard Italy against both barbarians and any sortie by the deeply distrusted Postumus over the Alps. Some of the cavalry were used as Gallienus' personal bodyguard, and coins struck at this time honour the new, elite force. Most thought-provoking are the large gold medallions offered to the unit's officers and inscribed 'Because you have remained loyal'.

Details of the organization of the heavy cavalry are unknown. There would be no formal separation of infantry and cavalry units until the reorganization by the emperor Constantine in the fourth century. The late fourth-century Roman military historian Vegetius⁷ hints that legions of the late third century incorporated 726 cavalrymen, less than one-eighth of the total legionary manpower. He states also that the purpose of the armoured cavalry was to be used in close conjunction with the armoured infantry, where they would be effective against enemy soldiers advancing in loose order towards, or running away from, the Roman infantry. The mobile army was very costly, for horses are expensive to maintain. It resulted in an increase in the financial burden, already enormous, borne by the citizens. As coins were virtually valueless, payments had to be made in kind.

The worst barbarian invasion⁸

In 267–268 Gallienus had to face the worst incursions of all by barbarian invaders. The Goths had previously made a land and sea assault from the river Dniester in the north of the Black Sea in c. 258 (see previous chapter).

Now the Goths made a renewed raid to the west with sea transport provided by the Heruli tribesmen. Five hundred ships carried barbarian pirates from the Sea of Azov towards Asia Minor and Greece; thousands of other barbarians ran on foot on the northern shores of the Black Sea until they entered the Balkans. Ravaging and looting all the Roman provinces in the area, apparently they seized many cities. The general/historian Dexippus tried unsuccessfully to check them when they attempted to seize Athens, probably in 267. Unfortunately only fragments of Dexippus' *Chronicle* have survived, but we learn that the historian himself held out on a series of fortified hills, managed to rally some of the troops fleeing from Athens and made a sudden swoop on the poorly guarded pirate fleet at Piraeus, destroying it completely.⁹

The Goths had now lost many of their unseaworthy 'ships', little better than barges, through the actions of Dexippus and through accidents. Because they were poor sailors anyway, they had little enthusiasm for the homeward passage across the choppy waters of the Black Sea as winter approached. The Goths resolved to trek back home northwards through Thrace and across the river Danube. This gave the Romans their chance.

The sequence of events is again unclear from the sources. Some say that Gallienus was at this time engaged in a battle with Postumus, but he sent generals such as Marcianus to deal with the invasion in his name and they won many hard-fought battles by land and by sea. The modern belief is that subsequently Gallienus in person, hastening from northern Italy with his armies and his heavy cavalry, caught the Goths in spring 268 as they trudged northwards laden with their booty and defeated them heavily near the river Nestus on the Macedonian–Thracian boundary, a victory more often attributed to Gallienus' successor, Claudius. At long last, the grasping barbarians had been given a decisive thrashing. Gallienus tried to negotiate with the survivors, offering them safe conduct out of Roman territory and awarding *Ornamenta Consularia* to one of their chieftains.

Gallienus could not stay to savour his victory. He had left the cavalry commander Aureolus as commander in Raetia, but the news now reached Gallienus that the treacherous Aureolus, who had

already revolted and been pardoned once, had declared himself for Postumus at Mediolanum. It is not clear whether he expected aid from the latter, who in any case did not give it. Aureolus actually issued coins in the name of Postumus in Mediolanum, which was one of the most important mint cities. Back went Gallienus with most of his forces to northern Italy. He left behind two generals to mop up any straggling Gothic parties returning from their looting expeditions. Gallienus' army defeated the forces of the traitor north-east of Mediolanum in the summer, and Aureolus retired to that town, his base, where he was bottled up and besieged by Gallienus.

Deaths of Gallienus and Postumus

Several officers of the besieging force now entered into conspiracy against Gallienus. Heraclianus, the praetorian prefect, Marcianus, his general against the Goths, and Cecropius, the alleged commander of the Dalmatian cavalry, decided to murder their emperor and to replace him with another general, Claudius. Aurelius Victor claims that the plot was that of Aurelian, already a highly respected general, while Zonaras, apparently citing a different source, acknowledges that the plot was hatched after the arrival of Aurelian and his heavy cavalry, but that the principal architect was Heraclianus. The significance is that therefore Aurelian must be commander of the Dalmatian cavalry, and Cecropius – a very rare name in Latin – is a code name for Aurelian by contemporary writers who dared not name him directly. Dexippus, for example, certainly a major source for Zonaras' history, must have been writing his own history during the reign of Aurelian. It is possible, even likely, that the future emperor Claudius was himself involved. Although Claudius was not at Mediolanum with the other conspirators, it has been surmised that he was sent away to a safe distance so that he could not become a suspect party.

The reasons for the conspiracy are unclear to us today, although the ancient Latin writers moralize at great length about Gallienus' (alleged) personal vices and weaknesses. Was it because he was too cultured for the military requirements of the time? Not sufficiently Danubian? All the conspirators were themselves of Danubian origin, as was Claudius, and this Balkan area continued to produce the best generals and the hardiest troops. Vagi¹⁰ believes that Claudius had been the earlier chief of the heavy cavalry (as Zonaras claims), and would probably have fought Aureolus at Mediolanum, but that Gallienus, arriving after the defeat of the Goths and faced with the

continued defiance of Aureolus, had demoted Claudius to commander of the reserves at Ticinum. According to Vagi, the humiliation would have incited Claudius to murder his emperor. This sequence hardly explains why the other main military commanders would want to appoint an apparent failure as replacement emperor. Was the assassination inspired by the Senate, still smarting from its deprivation of its accustomed military commands? Was the problem economic chaos, for the currency was reaching new lows of value, or highs of debasement, depending on your point of view? We may never know, unless archaeology makes new finds. What *is* clear is that Gallienus was to be murdered by a group of his own, hand-picked officers, who must have owed him many favours, and this fact alone has caused very recently a certain amount of reconsideration as to whether the ancient writers understood him better than we think we do.

The assassination was worked somewhat elaborately. One of the conspirators rushed into the emperor's tent late at night, shouting that Aureolus and his forces had made a sortie from their city and were approaching. Gallienus at once jumped onto his horse, without armour, and charged towards the supposed scene of action, shouting behind him for his personal bodyguard to follow as quickly as they could. In the darkness, a prearranged assassin waited; he rode up and stabbed the unprotected Gallienus to death. Whatever the opinion of the Latin writers, it is clear that the conspirators had correctly assessed their emperor's courage. The evidence of papyri, which usually salute the reigning emperor, places the death about August 268, although some historians favour dates as early as March.

Gallienus had been joint emperor from 253 to 260, and sole emperor from 260 to 268. He had been detested by the Senate, who refused flatly to make him a god according to the usual custom. Further, rejoicing at his death, they then went on to arrange the murders of all the friends and relatives of Gallienus at Rome, including his widow, his younger brother (consul in 265) and his last surviving son (consul in 268). However, the reputation of Gallienus with his own troops was far higher. After his death the legionaries of his army mutinied and had to be quietened by the time-proven expedient of a donation to each man of twenty gold pieces. The new emperor, Claudius, countermanded the orders to kill those supporters of Gallienus who still survived, insisted to the Senate that it was necessary to deify Gallienus to placate the army, and eventually he got his way. Nevertheless, we may note that Gallienus' name was erased

from many monuments at this time.

Gallienus managed to avert the disintegration of the entire Roman world through his tenacity. The judgement of posterity has been far kinder to Gallienus than that accorded by his fellow countrymen.

The guardian of the Gallic–Roman Empire lasted scarcely longer than the official emperor. While Gallienus fought usurpers and barbarians, the pretensions of the western empire under Postumus had continued to ape those of Rome herself. Postumus, who may have been a Gaul, manufactured his own Senate and two consuls, and created a Praetorian Guard of his own to defend his capital at Augusta Treverorum (modern Trier). Archaeology suggests that the economic efficiency of his empire, and the levels of its culture, were at least the equal of those at Rome, and coins were produced with Postumus' image from his own mints. His government was described as restrained with its citizens and conducted with great vigour against its enemies. Postumus defeated the Alamanni and Franks on the Rhine frontier in 261, and awarded himself the titles of *Germanicus Maximus*, *Restitutor Galliarum* and, provocatively and inaccurately, *Restitutor Orbis* (Restorer of the World). Interestingly, his coins also display the legend *Roma Aeterna*. The Gallic–Roman Empire might have a new ruler, but it had not seceded from Rome. Although the uneasy peace between Gallienus and Postumus had resulted in the loss of the Agri Decumates to barbarians, Postumus was able to re-establish forts in that territory.

Postumus himself, although much admired by the Latin writers in preference to Gallienus, could never march on Rome without facing a rebellion in his rear centred on the powerful Rhine armies. When Aureolus mutinied against Gallienus and called on Postumus for aid, the latter was even then engaged in putting down a major revolt by Laelianus, who had issued coins naming himself as emperor. After he refused to let his victorious troops plunder the defeated city (Moguntiacum; modern Mainz) of the rebel, his own troops put Postumus to death, probably in late 268 or spring 269.

Postumus had ruled for eight to nine years, a length of time far in excess of that achieved by any previous pretender, and the military commanders of the Gallic Empire can have had little enthusiasm for a return to rule by the legitimate emperor. The original prime reason for their defection – fears about barbarians crossing the Rhine if the garrisons were depleted for use in other parts of the empire – remained valid, and they must also have feared punishment for their

desertion. These considerations did not apply to Spain and its single legion VII Gemina, which reverted to central rule shortly after the death of Postumus. Thus Postumus' successors ruled only over Gaul and Britain.

Claudius II 'Gothicus' (268–270)

M. Aurelius Claudius was born on 10 May in about the year 214 in the Roman province of Upper Moesia. Later Roman historians believed him to have been a descendant of the young emperor Gordian III. By 268 he was the training commander for senior officers at Ticinum, 20 miles (32 kilometres) from Mediolanum, and was clearly regarded highly by preceding emperors as a capable general. He was one of the Danubians, commanding some of the toughest troops of the Roman army. His accession as emperor was arranged by the murderers of Gallienus, who claimed that with his dying breath Gallienus had appointed Claudius as his successor. This was wholly improbable, as Gallienus had already appointed two sons, Valerian II and the Saloninus murdered by Postumus, as caesars, and there remained a third son at Rome who would have been the natural successor. Moreover, the circumstances surrounding the death of Gallienus hardly favoured the opportunity for any genuine expression of dying wishes. With the loyalty of the troops secured with a bribe, Claudius' first action was to settle the siege of Aureolus at Mediolanum. The isolated pretender tried to negotiate with the new emperor, but Claudius rejected his overtures. Aureolus then surrendered, presumably on terms he had deemed acceptable, but was at once put to death by the angry soldiers of Gallienus' army.

It was at this time that the Alamanni festering in Germany made a disastrous misjudgement. They noted that the Roman frontier defences had been weakened by the withdrawal of troops by Gallienus and Aureolus, and poured into the province of Raetia, where many settled, before surging over the Brenner Pass through the Alps into northern Italy. Happily for the Romans, Claudius had arrived to take command of the huge combined armies of Gallienus and Aureolus that were conveniently on the spot just as the Alamanni burst into the area around Lake Garda. There nemesis overtook the marauders; Claudius smashed them utterly and only half of the barbarians survived to return to their homelands with tales of the might of Rome. Another important battle was fought near Ariminum in north-eastern Italy.

Claudius was now able to hurry down to Rome, where he tried to check the attacks on Gallienus' supporters, and was recognized as

emperor by the Senate in 268. The grateful senators also conferred the title *Germanicus Maximus* on Claudius for his victory over the Alamanni. His coins show another of the bearded Danubian generals with a radiate head, but it seems that he made a real attempt to restore good relationships between emperor and Senate, after his predecessor's disregard of that institution.

After the death of Postumus, the time must have seemed right to try to retake the Gallic–Roman Empire. Claudius sent an expeditionary force under Julius Placidianus to harry the rebels during spring 269, and the mere arrival of the main army west of the Alps, at Cularo (modern Grenoble), was sufficient to induce Spain to revert to the central Roman rule, as previously mentioned. Placidianus is known from an inscription¹¹ to have been the praetorian prefect (an office that originally provided the commander of the Praetorian Guard at Rome, but by now imparted important provincial commands) who watched over the Gallic Empire from Cularo. Furthermore, the town of Augustodunum (Autun), which was within central Gaul and far to the north of Cularo, and was the centre of the Aedui tribe, declared for Claudius.¹² The townspeople waited eagerly for the arrival of reinforcements from the new emperor, but Claudius himself could not tarry; the Goths in the Balkans were again causing trouble. Claudius announced: 'The quarrel with the Gallic emperor is my quarrel, but the barbarian invasion is the State's quarrel. The latter must have priority.' The expeditionary force was withdrawn to its barracks, and the new rebel emperor, Victorinus, recaptured and plundered the unfortunate Augustodunum after a seven-month siege had wrought famine and ended the town's ability to man the gates. The ruins of the city would not be restored for another three decades.

Having looted all the nearest Roman provinces, it appears that the new Gothic invaders had resolved now to settle as permanent bandits within Roman territory. A huge migration of tribes, with baggage trains bearing possessions and families, moved across the poorly guarded Danube into Thrace and Macedonia and across the Bosphorus and thence spread their violent activities around Asia Minor (269). It may be recalled that Gallienus had earlier inflicted a severe defeat on the first invaders, before being summoned away to deal with Aureolus. In his absence, his general Marcianus had continued to harass the Goths, but the barbarians were now reinforced by the new arrivals and again besieged many cities in the area. The most important siege was that of Thessalonika.

Claudius ordered the consultation of the Sibylline Books before setting out against the Goths. When the oracle announced that 'the leading man of the most elevated order had to be sacrificed to victory', the leader of the Senate, T. Pomponius Bassus, who would become twice consul and prefect of the City of Rome, offered himself, but Claudius declared that it was for the emperor to make the sacrifice. Claudius left his brother, Quintillus, in charge of the northern Italian garrisons, and then hastened to join Marcianus. The sieges were lifted as Claudius arrived on the spot in person with many legions under their commander Aurelian, a fellow Danubian general, together with the Roman heavy cavalry.

The Goths were driven north by Aurelian and his cavalry. Fresh bands of Goths came down across the Danube to aid the first wave. All were crushed by Claudius in a pitched battle at Naissus in 269, separate from that won by Gallienus in 268, which also resulted in heavy Roman losses. Inscriptions dated to 269/270 show that Claudius overcame the Goths at Doberus in Macedonia and at Naissus in Moesia.

The barbarian survivors wandered in large bands around Thrace, harassed all the time by the deadly Roman cavalry. Finally they were driven into the 'Great Balkan Range' of mountains, principally Mount Haemus, in Moesia. The Roman strategy was to place a ring of steel around the hills and then to draw it tight. The Goths had to endure an evil winter (269/270) on the mountain tops, wracked by famine and plague. When their provisions ran out, the barbarians came down in small groups in search of food. They were hit in turn by the Roman cavalry and then by the slower infantry; thousands of barbarians were massacred near Marcianopolis, a walled city that they had previously tried unsuccessfully to capture. The barbarian survivors in the Balkans tried to flee north, but they had already ravaged the lands and could find no food. Famished, and stricken by plague, they were chopped down piecemeal by the pursuing Roman cavalry. Some of the desperate pursued made a stand and managed to make a surprise attack, killing 2,000 Roman infantrymen, but again the Roman heavy cavalry turned the tide.

The Roman navy operating out of Egypt had destroyed the barbarian ships, manned by Heruli tribesmen, in the Aegean. Some of the pirates had reached as far as Cyprus and Crete but had achieved little. Those remnants of the Goths that survived the land war were conscripted into the Roman army or settled as colonists in the areas

near the Danube that they had devastated (270); the original population had largely fled or been killed. The Augustan Histories tell us that many, many slaves were also taken from the Goths and huge amounts of booty were seized – one should say, recovered. For these comprehensive victories Claudius was awarded the title *Gothicus Maximus* and his coins commemorate *Victoria Gothica* (Victory over the Goths).

The idea of settling former enemies within Roman territory was not a new one and had a practical intent: the newcomers provided a welcome source of hardy recruits for the army and also acted as a buffer between other barbarians outside the frontier and the more civilized parts of the Roman Empire. However, the loyalty of such subjects was always uncertain. One hundred years later, a rebellion by other Gothic tribes settled within the frontier would lead to the destruction of the entire Roman army sent to tame them, and set in motion the sequence of events that effectively brought down the Roman Empire. Moreover, the import of barbarians into what had once been a Roman, then an Italian, then an imperial army resulted in the increasing barbarization of that army. All these difficulties lay far in the future.

While he was still mopping up the Goths, a task that would take all summer, Claudius learned of yet more barbarian invasions: by the Juthungi tribes into Raetia and by Vandals into Pannonia. Claudius delegated command of the legions against the Goths to Aurelian and then marched to Sirmium. However, the devastating plague had already afflicted his army, and Claudius himself succumbed. He convened his civilian and military heads and in their presence recommended that Aurelian be appointed as his successor. Then he died, probably in late August 270.

When the news reached Rome, the Senate and population were shattered by the premature loss of a fine general and merciful emperor. They reminded themselves of the Sibylline prophecy and how Claudius had declared that it was for the emperor to sacrifice himself. Now he was dead in his hour of glory. The Senate needed no urging to appoint Claudius to a position among the gods. A golden shield was placed in the Senate house, mimicking that awarded to Augustus; several ancient writers attest the award to Claudius. The people subscribed to erect a golden statue 10 feet tall in front of the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, a commemoration without precedent. On the Rostra (the orators' platform in the Forum) was

placed a column with a silver statue.

Such was the esteem in which the memory of Claudius was held by his subjects. The sweeping successes of Claudius against the Goths had earned their victor the appellation *Gothicus*. After his death, a handful of Goths still menacing the Balkans made an attack on the town of Anchialus on the west coast of the Black Sea, but so great had been the extent of Claudius' victory that the local military were able to deal with the new alarm. In the next decades, newly appointed emperors, starting with Constantine, would be proud to trace their lineage, real or imagined, back to Claudius, and some incorporated the cognomen 'Claudius' into their official names. It has become fashionable to assert that the victories of Claudius have been exaggerated by Latin historians writing under the rule of later emperors who claimed descent from him. This raises the question of why anyone should want to claim lineage from Claudius unless his achievements had already been spectacular, and the statues described, no longer extant but doubtless well known to chroniclers of the fourth century, and inscriptions tell their own story.

The eastern problem

Gallienus and Claudius had been happy to leave the Palmyrene Empire in place so long as it acknowledged the real emperor and safeguarded the eastern frontier. However, Zenobia's kingdom was growing into a real threat after the death of Gallienus. It is quite likely that the Palmyrenes felt obliged to the emperor who had appointed Odaenathus as ruler of the east, but not to those who had murdered that emperor. The distractions that the barbarians gave Claudius also afforded the Queen of Palmyra her chance.

Zenobia's son Vaballathus, in whose name she ruled nominally, had been given various high-sounding eastern titles, such as *Corrector Totius Orientis*, *Imperator*, 'King of Kings' and 'Lord of Palmyra', but these probably represented an attempt to impress their subjects with the continuity of reign between the late Odaenathus and his son. The problem was that, although Zenobia and Vaballathus were still endorsed as Rome's eastern rulers in the Middle East, and expecting their authority to be recognized in provinces from Asia Minor to Egypt, many Roman forces declined to accept the Palmyrenes as their overlords. Zenobia decided to enforce her writ.

Zenobia first marched westwards and seized Syria, including the important city of Antioch (c. 269). Forces under her general, Zabdas, then moved to occupy the Roman province of Arabia. The local

frontier commander, Trassus, and his legion were defeated heavily near the town of Bostra. Trassus was killed and Bostra sacked (270; see map on [page 27](#)). At the same time, the mint at Antioch stopped issuing coins in the name of Claudius. The southern town of Petra was next to fall, and the Palmyrenes now controlled all of Judaea, where they leaned on Egypt. Although coins were minted at Alexandria, in Egypt, for Claudius, this key province was also soon to change sides. Timagenes, a Roman officer, had rebelled in Lower Egypt in favour of Zenobia, who sent Zabdas to give aid in a move timed in early October 270 to capitalize on the death of Claudius. A combined force of 70,000 Palmyrenes, Syrians and barbarians overthrew the defence of 50,000 Egyptian troops in a pitched battle. The Palmyrenes then withdrew, leaving behind a garrison of 5,000 men. Saunders¹³ points out that the sizes of the forces must be exaggerated: a remote desert city state simply could not field as many as 70,000 troops (the total population has been estimated at only 36,000 in AD 300, admittedly when the city was in decline) but some renegade Roman troops may have been deployed too. We may add also that the two African legions – if two at full strength could be spared – could not have put up a force of 50,000 either, even if augmented with the two auxiliary African legions. From the evidence of papyri, it seems that the whole Palmyrene campaign in Egypt was over within two months.

During 269/270 the Roman fleet based at Alexandria had been conducting operations in the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean to aid Claudius by ridding the eastern Mediterranean of the Gothic sea pirates. The admiral Tenagino Probus (named as Probatas in the Augustan Histories, but known more accurately from inscriptions in Egypt) was in charge. After dealing with the Goths and their Heruli allies, Probus used his naval troops and a force of Egyptian volunteers to eject the Palmyrene garrison from Alexandria in early November 270 and then collected reinforcements from Egypt and the neighbouring Roman provinces of Africa to withstand the inevitable counter-attack. The Romans won a convincing victory over the returning Palmyrenes and pursued their eastern enemies. However, Timagenes was able to use his local knowledge to mount a surprise attack on the Roman force in the mountainous area near Babylon; not the well-known city, but a Roman garrison fort at the southern tip of the delta of the river Nile. The Romans were routed, and Probus was captured and committed suicide. Thus, within one month Egypt had returned into Palmyrene hands, threatening the corn supply to Rome. This could not be allowed to continue.

Chapter Four

Aurelian – The Early Years

Our only source of knowledge for the early life of Lucius Domitius Aurelianus Augustus (Aurelian) is the writer known as ‘Flavius Vopiscus of Syracuse’, one of the six named authors of the *Augustan Histories*.¹

The poor reliability of this source was mentioned in the Introduction. Nevertheless, the stories concerning Aurelian’s early life remain of interest. The military career of the future emperor, as narrated, is certainly consistent with the career that might have been expected, while the entire biography must have been at any rate credible to the author’s contemporary readers. In the absence of any other significant information, it is impossible to say how much of the early life as narrated by Vopiscus is accurate. The wise modern biographer does not blindly accept that which he reads but, being aware of his ignorance, does not blindly reject it either. In particular, the original author of Aurelian’s biography, whoever he was, and whenever he wrote, may well have had sight of a presumed panegyric to Aurelian, now lost (see Introduction).

Aurelian, then, was born on 9 September,² probably in the year 214 or 215,³ at Sirmium (modern Mitrovitz in Serbia) in the Roman province of Pannonia.⁴ Some other sources claim his birthplace in the province of Lower Moesia, later to be called Dacia Ripensis. He came of humble origins. His father was a farm worker for a senator named Aurelius. His mother was a priestess of the temple of the Sun god in their village.

The historian Vopiscus, following a two-century old tradition established by his better-known predecessor Suetonius, likes to mention the omens that portended the elevation of the future emperor. These make fascinating reading today, providing an insight into the signs that the superstitious ancient peoples found significant.

Aurelian’s mother often quarrelled with his father and one day, with reference to their poverty, snapped at him: ‘Behold the father of an emperor.’ She made the baby clothes from a purple cloak, which had previously been dedicated by a recent emperor, probably the Sun-worshipping Septimius Severus, to the Sun god. One day an eagle snatched up the purple-clad baby and placed him unharmed on a local

shrine, which fortunately was unlit. When Aurelian was a child, a snake wound itself around his wash basin, and could not be dislodged. His mother claimed the snake as a member of the household. This bizarre tale draws its point from the well-attested fact that snakes symbolized the *genius* of the family head, and were sometimes kept as pets.

When he was older, Aurelian joined the Roman army as a humble foot soldier. This must have been in about the year 235, for the customary time to join the army was twenty years of age, and was close to the end of the reign of the emperor Severus Alexander and the beginning of the period of crisis. He was described as ‘comely, good to look upon with manly grace, tall in stature and possessed of many strong muscles’. The sixth-century Byzantine chronographer Malalas, who provides physical details of most of the emperors, asserts that Aurelian as emperor was ‘tall, thin, slightly bald, small-eyed, all grey, big-hearted, active’. His source of information is unknown and is even more suspect than that of the Augustan Histories.

Aurelian distinguished himself early by his military prowess. As part of a garrison of 300 men, he intercepted a raid by the ‘Sarmatians’ when they burst into Illyricum and allegedly he killed forty-eight barbarians in one day, followed by another 950 over several more days. This (we are told) gave rise to a children’s song:

Thousand, thousand, thousand, we have beheaded;

A single man a thousand we have beheaded;

A thousand cups he may drink who a thousand has killed;

No one has nearly so much wine as the amount of blood that he shed.

It doesn’t rhyme in Latin either.

While the claim is ridiculous, it is quite clear that Aurelian’s bravery and skills were early recognized. He must have received several rapid promotions, first to centurion and including a spell as deputy to one or more military tribunes, for the next we hear of him is as a military tribune stationed at Moguntiacum (modern Mainz, Germany) with the Sixth Legion Gallicana, which is otherwise unknown. There he aided the destruction of the Franks in Gaul during their invasions of 254–258 and was credited with killing 700 barbarians and the capture of 300, a feat that should surely be attributed to his unit rather than to their commander. This resulted in a new song:

A thousand Sarmatians, a thousand Franks,

Again and again we've killed.

We request a thousand Persians.

The old barriers to promotion for simple legionaries, which had formerly required the higher officers to be of senatorial or knightly rank, had disappeared completely. It was now possible for the humblest soldier to aspire to rise all the way to the highest ranks. Ignoring specialist positions, the line of promotion as an officer began with the post of centurion, then led to junior tribune, senior tribune who advised the legionary commander, commander of the legion, described variously as the prefect or the legate of the legion, and finally *Dux*, a general in command of at least one legion and auxiliary forces, and who often commanded the troops along an entire frontier. Saunders⁵ believes that only a member of an established military family could really expect to gain fast promotion in the third century, with a different line of promotion: at age twenty the prefecture of an auxiliary cohort, then to legionary tribune, and then an appointment as prefect of an auxiliary cavalry unit. This would take some ten years, presumably followed by further promotions, so that by age forty-five (year c. 260) the cavalry officer Aurelian would be an excellent candidate for high promotion into the heavy cavalry of Gallienus.

It was as a military tribune that his terrible ruthlessness, severity and strictness for discipline emerged, a discipline without contemporary equal. Aurelian was nicknamed 'Hand to sword' (*Aurelianus manu ad ferrum*) so that he might be distinguished easily from a fellow tribune, coincidentally also named Aurelian. Vopiscus cites an alleged letter from Aurelian to his deputy concerning military discipline: 'If you wish to be tribune, indeed if you desire to live, restrain the hand of the soldiers!' The deputy is advised to keep the soldiers from stealing from each other and from the citizenry. If they want plunder, they must seize it from Rome's enemies. They must look after their pack animals and behave with propriety. In turn, the officers must look to their men's well-being, their weapons and their uniforms. They must be treated as soldiers, not as slaves.

Another omen concerning Aurelian's future elevation came when, having been wounded so that he could not readily ride a horse, he rode in a carriage towards the great city of Antioch. A purple cloak spread out for him fell upon his shoulders. A century-old edict prohibited the use of a carriage within a city's walls, so Aurelian was forced to transfer to a horse. He was inadvertently given the emperor's own steed. When he realized the error, he switched at once to another

mount, but this second portent was equally noted.

General for the emperor Valerian

Aurelian's career continued to flourish. He must have been promoted to the post of prefect (commander) of a legion, for Vopiscus informs us that now he became deputy to one or more Roman generals, who had the command of legions and auxiliary troops. It was at about this time – perhaps when he had become a full general – that Aurelian was appointed as an envoy to the Persians, where he received as gifts a sacrificial saucer from the Persian king, presumably Shapur, and an elephant. The first gift was commonly reserved for Roman emperors, the second could not legally be held except by a Roman emperor for military use. Aurelian was the first individual to own an elephant, and he passed it on at once to the legitimate emperor, not named but probably Valerian. Again, the omens for Aurelian's advancement were noted by his biographer.

Vopiscus records a letter from the emperor Valerian to the city prefect, named as 'Ceionius Albinus', possibly M. Nummius Ceionius Annius Albinus, known to have held the office in 256. During these difficult years, Valerian wished to reward those officers who had remained loyal, not only with promotions but also with more tangible benefits. However, he feared putting too heavy a tax burden on the provinces if the cash element were taken too far. Aurelian was deemed to be an exceptionally deserving case, being both brave and capable, and Valerian therefore promoted him to 'Inspector of military camps' while enjoining the city prefect to provide victuals and cash to Aurelian while the latter was at Rome.

Ulpus Crinitus

It is now that the senator Ulpus Crinitus comes to the fore. Although unknown outside the Augustan Histories, and his existence is strongly doubted by modern historians, he was allegedly the commander-in-chief (*Dux*) of the Illyrian and Thracian border under the emperor Valerian. Aurelian was made his deputy. When Crinitus was ill, Valerian ordered Aurelian to tackle a Gothic incursion around Nicopolis with full command. Aurelian was entrusted with the Third Legion and some 2,500 auxiliary troops as well as the forces of four friendly German chieftains. (Of five known 'Third Legions' at this time, the nearest, III Italica, was stationed in Raetia – too far to the west to be plausibly involved. This whole account must be garbled or complete invention.)

As substitute and as deputy for Crinitus, Aurelian commanded

troops, repelled barbarian invasions, had the authority to distribute the booty from defeated Goths to his troops and enriched his provinces with captured spoils including horses, cattle and slaves. He was also able to provide the emperor personally with an immense quantity of loot seized from the barbarians, while Crinitus thanked Valerian for giving him such a talented deputy.

Yet Aurelian himself had always been a poor man, although doubtless he had gained personally from the wealth recovered from Rome's enemies. Perhaps all poverty is relative. At any rate, Crinitus decided to adopt him as his heir, maintaining a long-established tradition whereby distinguished aristocrats without sons continued their family line for posterity; Aurelian was already his protégé. Valerian planned to make Aurelian a consul, Vopiscus tells us, although Aurelian does not appear to have received his first consulship until 271, when he was already emperor. Owing to his general's relative poverty, Valerian instructed the treasury prefect to hand over specified sums of cash so that Aurelian could hold celebratory races in the Circus and provide a huge banquet for the senators and knights. The consulship was to be taken with Ulpus Crinitus in order to 'fill out' the consulships of Valerian and Gallienus, starting on 22 May 257.

The appointment must have been delayed, as the historian now cites an audience of Aurelian with Valerian in 258 from the book of the 'Master of Admissions', a record of discussions kept by the freedman who decided whom the emperor would see. Valerian and his highest officials were resident at the Public Baths at Byzantium when Aurelian was received. The emperor thanked his general publicly for freeing the State from Gothic incursions and gave him numerous rewards, together, we are told, with his appointment as consul. Aurelian arose and thanked his emperor with 'soldierly words', saying that he had done it all for the approval of the State and of his conscience.

Ulpus Crinitus now stood up and announced the adoption of Aurelian as his son, with the blessing of the emperor. Crinitus himself was supposedly of the Ulpia family, whose most famous son had been the emperor Marcus Ulpus Trajanus (Trajan), so that it would certainly have been a signal honour to Aurelian. Many years later, Aurelian would place a painting, showing his adoptive father with Aurelian, in the new Temple of the Sun at Rome (see [chapter 7](#)). Crinitus now drops out of history.

General for the emperors Gallienus and Claudius

After the death of Valerian, Vopiscus omits to mention any part that Aurelian played under the rule of Gallienus, or of his part in the conspiracy that felled the latter. We learn only that he held many commands as general, but the emperors are not mentioned. One might conjecture that Aurelian fell out of favour with Gallienus, explaining the biographer's silence and the general's role in the conspiracy, but this seems unlikely. Aurelian may have aided Aureolus and Domitianus, Gallienus' generals, to suppress the eastern usurper Macrianus and his sons. One might suppose also that Aurelian would have been present as a senior cavalry officer when Gallienus dealt with the massive Gothic incursion of 267. He must have accompanied the emperor when Aureolus rebelled, in order to be part of the conspiracy against Gallienus.

We are now returning to more certain historical ground,⁶ and not relying solely on Vopiscus. Under the reign of the new emperor Claudius, Aurelian remained loyal. Claudius entrusted the wars against the Goths and Heruli, who had poured out of the Sea of Azov in about 267 (see previous chapter), to Aurelian. He was appointed full commander of the legions in the area and, against his old adversaries, Aurelian again acquitted himself well. When some of the heavy cavalry force ran into a serious disaster towards the end of the campaign, Claudius dismissed its commanders for being 'rash' and acting without orders. Aurelian was assigned as general of this large, elite force, perhaps replacing Cecropius, the last named commander of the heavy cavalry, if Cecropius really existed (see previous chapter). This would have been a huge distinction and a mark of trust by the emperor. Late in 269 Claudius left Aurelian in charge of mopping up operations against the Goths whom Claudius had defeated in Thrace and Moesia. Then Claudius died in August 270, supposedly recommending that Aurelian be the next emperor.

Quintillus (270)

Quintillus was the brother of Claudius. Stationed at Aquileia to protect the north-east of Italy from incursions, Quintillus promptly proclaimed himself as emperor after the death of Claudius. He was hailed as such by the Roman Senate and coins were issued in his name, but he made the error of remaining at Aquileia. He should have gone to Rome to obtain the Senate's official blessing.

Aurelian had probably been the author of the conspiracy that saw the murder of Gallienus and the accession of Claudius. He had

remained loyal to the new emperor. After the death of the latter, he claimed to be Claudius' chosen successor, in rivalry with Quintillus, but felt it first necessary to complete the campaign against the barbarians in the Balkans for which Claudius had left him in charge. Aurelian continued to augment his 'illustrious' (Vopiscus) reputation by crushing the retiring Goths, perhaps relieving the sieges of the cities of Anchialus and Nicopolis, before he moved to Sirmium in Pannonia. He and his cavalry had destroyed the Gothic forces completely and recovered huge quantities of booty. At Sirmium, he would meet the other senior commanders of Claudius, in order to seek their support. Aurelian was acclaimed as the true emperor, the legitimate heir of the dying Claudius, by his army in September and was rapidly supported by all the other Roman legions, including those of Quintillus. Aurelian was fifty-six years old.

The army of Quintillus refused to heed their commander's speeches claiming accession and it was put to him that he ought to stand down in favour of the better man, rather than initiate another bloody civil war. Quintillus went to the extreme length of committing suicide by allowing his veins to be opened in the traditional Roman manner. His reign was certainly not longer than two or three months, from archaeological evidence dating the death of Claudius and the accession of Aurelian. Claims in some of the ancient literature (e.g. Jerome's *Chronicle*) that he ruled for only seventeen days are clearly in error. Coins depicting him as emperor are known from every Roman mint, excepting that controlled by the Palmyrenes at Antioch. Since no coin minted at Alexandria for Quintillus has been dated after November 270, and it would take a month for the news of his death to have travelled to Egypt from Rome, it seems that Quintillus probably died at latest in October 270. No papyrus has yet been found that names him as emperor.

The accession of Aurelian is known from the evidence of Egyptian papyri to have been actually somewhere between September and December 270. A legal rescript of Aurelian is dated to 26 October, which indicates that he was emperor by then. Further, the mint at Alexandria issued coins very briefly for Aurelian alone, before producing coins celebrating both Aurelian and the Palmyrene Vaballathus before 10 December. However, Aurelian declined to recognize the rule of Quintillus, and chose to backdate his reign to the death of Claudius, sometime in about August 270. Rather curiously, Egyptian papyri recognize in turn, first the rule of Claudius, then by

consuls (*sic*) from October to December 270, and then joint rule by Aurelian and Vaballathus. Almost certainly this reflects changing attitudes by the Palmyrene administrators at that time controlling Egypt.

Aurelian's army

This is a good place to discuss the nature of the Roman army that Aurelian had inherited. Most readers are doubtless familiar with the general appearance of the army of the first half of the first century AD, say from Augustus to Nero, through numerous depictions with varying degrees of authenticity in films. Readers who live in Britain may also have seen the much more accurate reenactments by the 'Ermine Street Guard', which also features in documentaries.

The army of Aurelian would certainly have been readily recognizable by a Roman soldier of the first century.⁷ Although there had been some changes in protective armour and in tactics, it remained fundamentally the same fighting force although, as already mentioned, an elite formation of heavy armoured cavalry now formed its core. During Republican times, the Romans needed to operate *contarii*, cavalrymen with a large sword and lance (*contus*). By the end of the second century AD there existed units of *cataphractarii*, lightly armoured riders whose attire can still be seen with some inscriptions. However, the Persians were using *clibanarii*, heavily armoured cavalrymen whose horses were also covered with armour. The name derives from *clibanus* – an oven or baking vessel – which gives an idea of what it felt to be so armoured, particularly in the sun. Gallienus greatly increased the number of *clibanarii* units for his new mobile army, but the new 'Dalmatian cavalry', lightly mailed *cataphractarii*, predominated.⁸

Heliodorus gives us a detailed account of a Persian *clibanarius* in his novel *Aethiopica*. Heliodorus himself was self-proclaimed a native of Phoenicia, based at Emesa, and an ardent worshipper of the Sun. His work probably dates to about 250, although some have identified him with a late fourth-century Christian (!) bishop of the same name. This seems to be most improbable. It is evident from the book itself: firstly that he had substantial knowledge of Egypt; secondly, from the extraordinary detail given, that he must have seen a Persian *clibanarius* and have been acquainted with the tactics of their use.

According to Heliodorus,⁹ the Persian *clibanarii* were men picked for their valour and great strength. Their heads down to the shoulders were enclosed completely in a single, tight-fitting helmet with only

two openings for the eyes. (Presumably there must also have been an opening through which to breathe.) The body and the arms all the way down to the knees were completely enclosed in scale armour, with the scales being of hand-palm size and all stitched together for rigidity. The mail was slit between the legs to allow the rider to sit on a horse. The mail was said to be impervious to any kind of dart, such as a small javelin or an arrow. The rider's lower legs were protected by boots, tied to the scale armour.

The horse was protected with a coat of linked (chain) mail thrown over its back and dangling loosely down so as not to impede movement, and with a metal mask over the face and metal guards over the legs. The horse was also fitted with a massive, sharp-pointed wooden ram, tied to the neck by a flexible cord, and anchored at the rear to the buttocks of the animal.

When required for operations, the armoured rider would be lifted onto his mount – certainly he could not climb onto it himself – and then the combination would ride at full speed towards the enemy 'like a man made of iron or a statue fashioned with hammers'. The horse would be steered with the left hand, while the right hand simply guided the direction of the ram whose impact could transfix up to two enemies at once. According to Heliodorus, these armoured riders would be stationed at the front of the army as an 'invincible wall'.

It is evident that a horse burdened with such weight cannot move very far. Heliodorus' own novel makes use of this fact for a fictional battle, where an African army bolstered by elephants moves very slowly towards the cantering Persian *clibanarii* for the express purpose that 'the enemies' cavalry should be weary before they came to blows.' When the *clibanarii* accelerate to a gallop, the forward African troops simply drop down, which apparently causes the charging horses to slow sharply, and then the soldiers stab upwards at the unprotected bellies of the horses. This causes the latter to collapse and throw their riders, who now could not move, and the Africans then kill the armoured Persian riders by stabbing under their thighs. In real life, other opponents of the Persians are known to have used lassos thrown from fast-moving horses to unseat the *clibanarii*. As we shall see, Aurelian would later discover two other effective methods for dealing with these heavily armoured cavalry. The central idea was always to knock the armoured riders off their horses, when the riders could not even stand up!

Roman horses were comparatively small and were saddled,

conferring much greater stability to the rider than a bareback mount. Even so, the stirrup, which greatly aids violent manoeuvres on a horse, had yet to be invented so that neither the Roman cavalry, nor their opponents, possessed this steadying item of equipment, which would not appear until the eighth century. Therefore the saddles had special horns to support the body. The famous legions remained as ten cohorts, now each of 555 men (the first cohort possessed 1,105 men), with 726 heavy armoured cavalry and with numerous attachments of light auxiliary forces, such as light cavalry. The total force probably exceeded 7,000 men.

The old distinction between the legions, manned by 'citizens', not necessarily from Italy, and auxiliary forces (who were not citizens, but could expect Roman citizenship after an honourable discharge) disappeared in 212, when the emperor Caracalla declared all free men within the empire to be citizens. However, there still remained a clear distinction between the first-class forces employed by the legions and the distinctly second-class units of various irregular militias. The legions were provided with much better equipment, almost invariably of iron, whereas the auxiliaries were often provided with cheap, mass-produced items. The auxiliaries were used mostly to help guard the frontiers of the empire.

We know of no pay increases received by the ordinary Roman soldier at all, after Caracalla's steep increases in the second decade of the third century. Yet the debasement of the currency had reduced the soldier's real pay by 99 per cent (from *denarius* of 75 per cent silver to *antoninianus* of 3 per cent, coupled with a reduction in the size of the coin)! In compensation, the soldier no longer had to pay for his own rations, bedding, clothing and weapons, and in fact received increased rations at no charge. Savings were provided in the form of frequent imperial handouts of gold and silver bullion, often made up into commemorative medals. Even so, the temptation for army units to indulge in corruption and to terrorize their neighbourhood must have been strong.

By the time of Aurelian, the standard legion had been found to be too inflexible for many purposes, and it was already the custom to create larger army units out of 'vexillations', detachments of specialist troops sent from one legion to aid the requirements of another formation. An elite force, such as Aurelian's main army, might contain vexillations of extra cavalry, archers, who were usually detached from the eastern legions where archery had attained a high degree of

proficiency, and even slingers, who threw heavy stones. The advantages of firing long-range missiles against a packed enemy force were slowly becoming apparent, and would achieve much greater prominence in the next century and thereafter. Again, a force built up to lay siege to a city would require extra vexillations of artillery units, predominantly of catapults that hurled huge boulders, or ‘Scorpions’, devices rather like over-sized crossbows that could project an arrow with deadly force and high precision over long distances.

The Scorpion was but one of several torsion-powered artillery units used by the Roman army.¹⁰ The concept had been invented by the Greeks, with the torsion required to fire a missile produced by the twisting of sinew rope. The sinews could be obtained from almost any animal, except the pig, and at a pinch even women’s hair would suffice, and the sinew would be stretched with a capstan mechanism operated by a crew of one or two. By 300 BC, this type of artillery could fire two large pointed bolts together, or a single stone of up to 173 pounds (78.6 kilograms). The Romans used larger wooden frames originally, to provide greater ranges, and regularly fired stone balls weighing some 57.6 pounds (26.2 kilograms).

By the third century, ‘Catapults’ fired large bolts, ‘Scorpions’ were light and handy, and easily rotated and elevated, while ‘Wild-asses’ (*onagri*) were singlearmed stone throwers even more powerful than the *ballistae* used in earlier times. The Scorpion was now made from a simple metal construction, which permitted greater tension and thus longer ranges, with a viewer for sighting and protected by a shield. It was incredibly accurate. A chieftain’s hut (on a hilltop site in England) had been attacked by a cruder Scorpion of Vespasian’s first century army, when eleven out of seventeen bolts fired from a range of about 160 yards (146 metres) had hit the hut – and some of the misses may have been ranging shots. A modern reconstruction was able to hit the same hut with forty-eight out of fifty bolts at the same range. The bolt itself was made of wood, with wooden flights at the end, and tipped with a metal point. Fired from a Scorpion, it would penetrate body armour. The Scorpion employed about five times the tension of even the strongest of archers, it fired further (in later examples, up to 400 yards, or 365 metres), the bolt had greater penetration than an arrow, and it had the high rate of fire that the Roman army deemed to be important among all its missile projectors. Up to four bolts could be fired per minute.

Vegetius,¹¹ writing at the end of the fourth century, by which time

the legions had been broken up into units of 1,000 men each, informs us that each legion would be fitted out with fifty-five cart-mounted 'Catapults' (presumably Scorpions) and ten of the much larger 'Wild-asses' that dwarfed their crew of eight. Emperor Julian (361-363) would employ whole legions of artillerymen. The Scorpion and the Wild-ass would continue in military use until well into the late medieval period.

Each legion was intended to be a self-contained unit, so far as practical. Many of the soldiers would be trained as craftsmen, from engineers to surveyors; from medical orderlies to road builders. When on the march, the army would carry all necessary equipment with it in a baggage train that would often include the coins for the soldiers' pay. This provided a strong incentive not to desert the standard. At the end of each day, typically after a march of 24 miles (13 miles with baggage train) (39 and 20 kilometres) on good Roman roads, the soldiers would set up camp. In territory threatened by an enemy, the camp would be surrounded by a complete wooden barricade made up from the two posts that each soldier carried on the march. The fence would be surrounded by a hastily dug ditch, while other soldiers stood on guard over the constructors of the camp. The marching army required a huge supply chain, some details of which have come down to us from the fourth century, but all would be provided in good time, usually by tax levies in kind on the local community. The army had to secure its supply line in enemy lands, although it was also possible to forage in fields of cereal crops. Contrary to common belief, the Roman soldiers were not predominantly vegetarian – unless forced to be – but ate the same foods, meat, cereals and shellfish, as the remainder of the population.

Each legionary was encased in heavy armour, protected by a shield and provided with a short stabbing sword with which he had been trained for his role as a skilled exponent of sword play within a line of similar swordsmen. There were three lines, which rotated regularly to the front row that actually did the fighting. Roman legionaries were not expected to indulge in slashing or twohanded sword sweeps, tactics that they viewed with contempt. The infantry would also carry one or two spears of different types, used for stabbing or for hurling against compact enemy lines where accuracy mattered little. An enemy shield transfixd by a spear became virtually unusable, and its bearer would have to discard it.

No soldier had to accept the personal protective equipment with

which he had been issued, if he wished to provide himself with a superior substitute, and the officers, who were better paid, in particular often wore the finest armour available. The metalwork did not roll off from a modern steel mill. It all had to be laboriously hand-finished with hammers, and therefore considerable variations arose in the standard issue, quite apart from natural developments in design. We no longer know how many armouries the Romans possessed, but it is generally believed that they were small and operated by free, or freed, men, not by slaves, under contract to the army. In the general economic decline of the third century, we may suppose that many of these small units would have ceased production – or even have been unable to move their output to where it was needed – so that skilled manufacture of armour and swords must have diminished just when it was needed most. Later, Diocletian (284–305) would find it necessary to organize state factories to manufacture the army's weapons and armour. There would then be twenty factories in the western half of the empire and fifteen in the east, counting both general and specialist manufacturers, operated by free workers subject to military discipline.

The best form of bodily protection was provided by linked mail, where thousands of tiny rings, made from extruded bronze wire and sometimes as small as 0.12 inches (3mm) each, were linked together. The rings could be bent to form the necessary circles, but the Romans employed the far stronger technique of riveting the links. Linked mail had been known since the sixth century BC, and provided immensely strong and flexible protection that could be extended to cover the torso, the upper arms and the thighs. The mail was very hard-wearing, but difficult to repair once damaged. It was also very heavy, weighing typically 15 pounds (6.8 kilograms). It is evident that handmade production of such mail must be terribly slow – 180 man hours per unit, according to modern reconstruction – and appropriately expensive. The mail could be reused time and time again but, if a legion so attired were to fall in battle, it would take a very long time to re-equip the replacement troops.

Scale armour was much easier to produce, and therefore cheaper than mail, and was widespread throughout the civilized world. Small, metallic, fish-like scales were allowed to dangle freely from rows of horizontal metal rings in such a way as to overlap each line below. The scales could be easily damaged, but were readily replaced. The scales provided lesser protection than mail against a direct sword thrust, while their big disadvantage was that they were almost useless

against a thrust upwards, such as might be made by a foot soldier armed with a spear against a mounted cavalryman. It is thought that scale armour should have been reasonably arrow-proof, since these missiles descend from above. By the time of Aurelian, much greater protection was afforded by attaching the scales to vertical rings, as well as horizontal, which left scarcely a chink open, but the result was far too stiff to permit ready movement of the body and the armour was employed best by cavalry troopers who had less need to bend. Scale armour would be used primarily by the auxiliary forces, but it was also used, as mentioned above, by both the Roman heavy cavalry and the Persian and Palmyrene *clibanarii* to protect their mounts.

The Romans invented the 'cuirass' type of laminated (overlapping) armour in the first century AD, where large strips of overlapping metal were held in place by rawhide thongs. These provided excellent protection of the torso, and separate laminated metal strips could protect the upper arms. Moreover, the armour was very flexible. It took only sixty hours to produce,¹² one third of the time needed for mail, was lighter at 12 pounds (5.5 kilograms) and conferred almost as much protection. Even so, it must have taken some time to re-equip all the legions, and scale armour persisted in the eastern provinces for many years after the first introduction of the cuirass. The general type went through at least two revisions, until the best version had been reached before Aurelian's time. A further addition by then had been the use of laminated metal strips to protect the sword arm. The upper thighs of the legionary were protected by *pteruges*, strips of tough leather, while metal guards, rather like cricket pads, shielded the lower legs.

With so much effort and cost expended on the armour, it is evident that every effort would be made to reuse it whenever possible. It is likely that some of Aurelian's men – especially those clad in mail – would be wearing armour that had seen service perhaps a century previously. The knowledge of this must have created a tremendous reinforcement of Roman military tradition.

The army's helmets were generally of a standard type, of iron for the legionaries and of bronze for the auxiliary troops. Again the style will be familiar from films, with the two hanging cheek pieces. However, some of Aurelian's heavy cavalry may by now have had their heads almost completely enclosed, bar part of the face, with a new design. Sword slashes by cavalrymen had become much more of a commonplace to both cavalry and infantry, so that the old metal

extension of the helmet at the back of the neck had been strengthened and widened on the helmets of Aurelian's soldiers.

The legionary shield had finally settled down to the familiar, curved rectangle, with a bronze boss in the middle to protect the bearer's hand. The shield could be used to punch an opponent, as well as for self-defence. By contrast, the cavalry seem to have used oval or even circular shields. Auxiliary forces may have used any pattern.

The old, deadly, double-sided Roman thrusting sword, a weapon that readily inflicted a mortal wound, was made of iron and had a handle finished with ivory, doubtless also often reused. Shields and swords were manufactured to be strong, so that they did not break easily in combat. Archaeological finds suggest that some Roman swords at this time were being replaced by an inferior slashing type, of barbarian pattern. Few Roman swords of this period remain after centuries of rusting, and the evidence is confusing as to the users of the new weapon. The cavalry, mounted on their horses, naturally needed a longer sword, but probably preferred to use spears, either for thrusting or for throwing. Similarly, the old, short legionary dagger had been dropped by the second century, but reappeared in the third as a strange, barbaric, long (16-inch, 41-centimetre) substitute. It appears that, as the importance of the infantry declined, their weaponry slowly became worse.

Roman units possessed their own standards known as 'eagles', long poles bearing elaborate images and decorations and borne by an appointed standard bearer. The standards were believed to carry the *genius* of the unit, so that loss of the eagle implied much more than disgrace, but a spiritual loss too. Roman soldiers were expected to guard their standards zealously, and their government would go to great lengths to try to recover any that had been captured.

Vegetius¹³ has passed down to us the standard Roman tactics at this time. The heavily armoured Roman infantry stood on favourable ground 'like a wall' in lines. Behind the wall were placed reserves of armoured infantry to patch up any break in the wall under attack, or for any other tactical purpose required by the legionary commander. The heavily armoured cavalry were also placed behind the infantry wall. Light auxiliary forces, such as slingers, archers and light cavalry, were placed in front of the wall. They advanced to challenge and harass the foe. If successful, they pursued the retreating enemy forces; otherwise, they retired behind the armoured wall as the enemy advanced. The heavy cavalry would then be moved forward to attack

straggling lines of advancing enemy soldiers, before retiring again behind the wall. The armoured legionaries of the wall would now engage in battle with javelins and then with their swords. Assuming they were successful and the enemy fell back, the heavy cavalry would smash into the retiring troops from the sides, while the light forces would continue the rout as far as necessary. Under no circumstances was the wall expected to break ranks and pursue the enemy.

It is only in recent years that attempts have been made to reconstruct the actual mechanism by which individual Roman soldiers fought. The Roman sources provide very sketchy information about sword fighting, and the bayonet remains the only comparable modern weapon. Modern military manuals state explicitly the effect of the 'terror of cold steel' on the enemy, an effect far greater than the less-feared (but much more effective) impersonal missile, such as a spear or a bullet. Roman armies and their adversaries had to confront this terror all the time, and it was probably only the possession of effective armour that made it bearable.

The idea projected by Hollywood films, that individual soldiers charged at each other and engaged in individual combat with opponents, is mistaken, for no sane soldier would leave his back exposed to an unseen enemy. The soldiers fought in lines at all times. The sources tell us that some battles went on for many hours. Yet how can heavily armoured men fight under conditions of, literally, life and death for so long without becoming rapidly exhausted? The Romans used three lines of swordsmen who would rotate regularly to relieve one another, but the lines would have needed time to rotate while their less-organized adversaries must have collapsed from physical and nervous exhaustion within an hour. Sabin¹⁴ has calculated that, if just 5 per cent of the troops on each side stood in the front row, they struck out just once every five seconds, and that only 1 per cent of the strikes caused the opponent to die, each army would still suffer 5 per cent casualties within just ten minutes. Yet victorious armies rarely suffered more than 5 per cent losses in total.

In fact, continuous battle is a physical and nervous impossibility for armies armed with swords, and it seems that the opposing lines of soldiers stood off from one another separated by a few metres, with weapons bristling, until part of one line nerved itself to move forward and engage its opposite numbers. Since few of the soldiers would willingly risk their lives in combat, especially to cold steel, it would require a great deal of incentive to induce any part of the line to

advance. Usually a standard bearer would lead the way, a grade of officers picked for their bravery and known to have an exceptionally high casualty rate. Most of the advancing soldiers would rank self-protection with their shields far higher than aggressive use of their swords during the engagement, so freedom of movement was essential. If they were successful, the enemy would fall back a little; if unsuccessful, the advancing party would retire again. One line might be pushed hundreds of metres if the other side were clearly superior.

With both sides mostly separated by a few metres, it is evident that the use of missiles such as javelins could be effective, and we know that this was a common cause of casualties even during the main battle. Roman javelins were designed to snap after first use, so that they could not be reused by the enemy. Such skirmishing could indeed go on for hours, and even have to end at the onset of darkness without either side having gained an advantage. Casualties during this period would be light, not exceeding for both sides the 5 per cent ultimately sustained by the winning army. However, if at any point one of the enemy lines collapsed or fell back in panic, the encouraged Roman troops could crash in, causing further panic and the less-organized enemy to start to run. It is now that the victors could hack down their fleeing opponents. In earlier times, casualty figures among the defeated army then rose to about 10 per cent dead, but the relentless and efficient Romans sought to maximize their advantage through the use of cavalry to pursue the vanquished, inflicting losses of about 15 per cent dead on their foes and completing the rout of the remainder. Even higher casualties were often inflicted on the poorly armoured barbarians. By contrast, the strict discipline and available reserves of a Roman army meant that it was less likely to fall back, and even when it was defeated it would normally have inflicted terrible losses on its victorious opponents.

It was the custom in ancient times for conquering armies always to plunder their defeated foes; the eagerly sought prize and recompense for their hard-fought victory. However, the disciplined Romans did not begin the pillaging until the enemy had entirely fled or surrendered. When the officers now gave the signal, there was systematic looting of the enemy camp or city by selected troops while the majority stood guard against a surprise attack. Thus there was no free-for-all such as had resulted in the undoing of countless less-drilled armies. The booty was later sold and the proceeds distributed to all the soldiers, including those who had been sick or sent on special

duties.

The Roman army put great store on rigidity in its orders of march or battle, holding that slackness created weaknesses that led to defeat. Military discipline had always been severe, but it had been allowed to lapse through the chaos of the middle of the third century. It was Aurelian's achievement that it was so strongly reinstalled into the army. It is worth emphasizing here the advantages that a properly organized, well-disciplined permanent Roman army backed by the resources of an empire had over its barbarian counterpart: guaranteed supplies, medical assistance, superior armour and weaponry created by skilled craftsmen, and the military advantages conferred by its constant training, practised tactics and superior order in battle. By contrast, the barbarian rabble, no matter how brave, fought as individuals and they were generally equipped only with a spear (the crudest form of aggressive weapon) and a shield made of skins bound over a wooden frame. They lacked the technology to manufacture swords and armour, and only rarely could support horses for use as cavalry. They relied on a single massed shock charge to break down their opponents and were extremely vulnerable to expert Roman archers, recruited from the east. The barbarians were baffled as soon as their food ran out and the land about them had been laid waste – usually by themselves.

The Roman army drawn up in full armour and ceremonial finery behind its standards must have been a glittering sight indeed, and the historian Dexippus gives us an account (see next chapter), probably as an eyewitness, of its effect on an awed barbarian mob. This was the army that Aurelian now controlled, rejuvenated by his reassertion of discipline, and still the most powerful military machine on the planet.

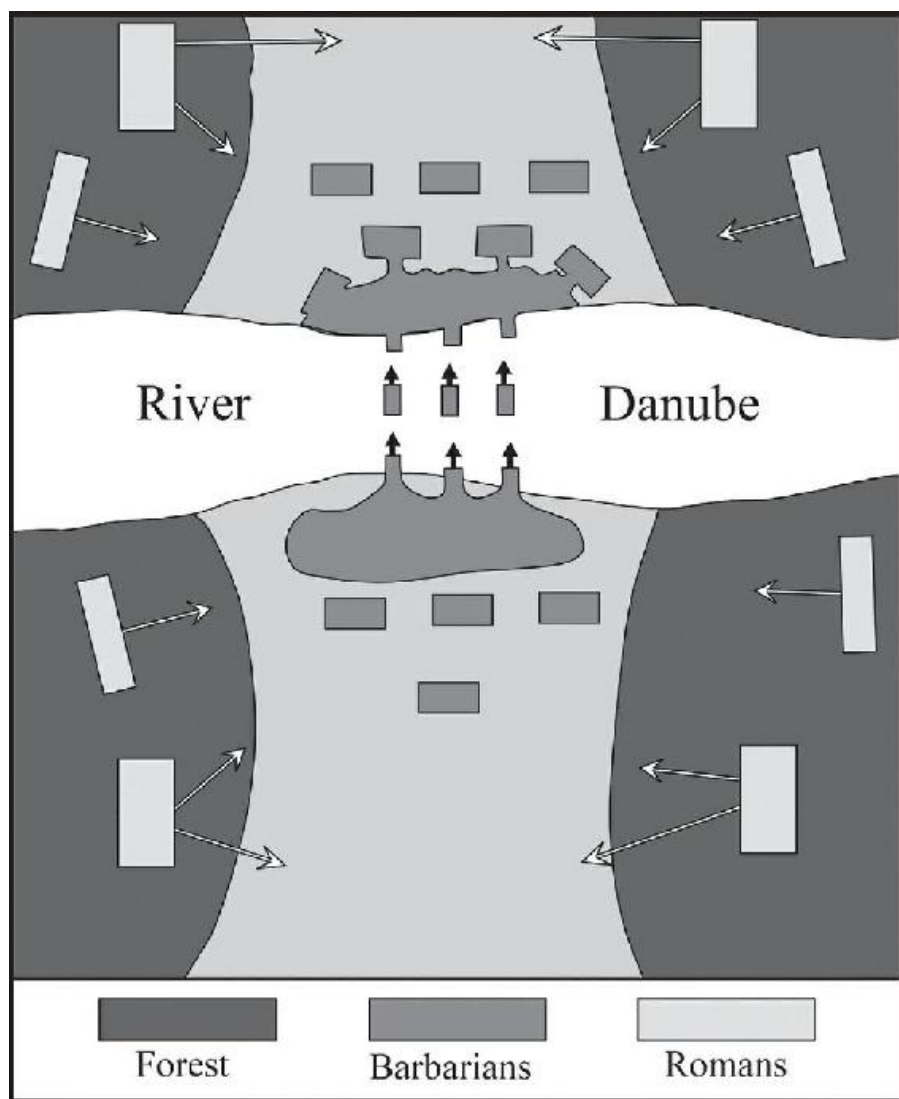
Chapter Five

Aurelian the Emperor (270–275)

Aurelian was now the sole recognized emperor,¹ the twenty-ninth to rule, within that part of the empire that still acknowledged Rome's authority. The mints of Cyzicus and Siscia (see maps [pages 27](#) and [25](#)) had already issued coins in his name; after the death of Quintillus the other Roman mints of Mediolanum (Milan) and Rome followed suit. However, he had no time to savour his success, as barbarians were threatening everywhere. He did not even have the time to travel to the capital city to get himself recognized formally by the Senate. Instead, a deputation of senators came to greet Aurelian at the northern Italian city of Ravenna in November 270.² The new emperor hoped to maintain the friendly relations that his predecessor (Claudius) had fostered with the Senate after the ill feeling generated previously by Gallienus, and planned to share his first consulship as emperor at the beginning of the new year with the leading man of their order, T. Pomponius Bassus. 'How should I rule wisely?' asked the emperor modestly. 'Make use of gold and iron,' replied one of the senators. 'Iron for those who are enemies, gold for those who co-operate.'

The order of events that follows is hopelessly confused in the literature. We shall follow the traditional sequence, but an alternative will be outlined later. Aurelian set out against the Juthungi tribe, from north of the Danube, who had invaded northern Italy opportunistically after the death of Claudius; the latter had died while moving to meet the threat. Since the defection of Postumus, the system of fortifications protecting the gap, the Agri Decumates, between the Rhine frontier and the Danube, had effectively been abandoned, despite attempts at restoration by Postumus, and the Alpine passes were undefended. Allegedly as many as 120,000 combined tribesmen on foot and horse had attacked the frontier cities in the province of Raetia and then devastated the area from the Danube in Raetia as far south as the Italian river Po. The tribesmen began to withdraw, burdened with their loot. Aurelian collected together an elite force of fleet-footed infantry that raced silently ahead to ambush the invaders on their retreat across the Danube. The Juthungi walked straight into the trap. As their hordes began the crossing of the river the Roman army, positioned in the forests in a crescent spread over both sides of the

water, closed the two arms of the crescent in front and behind the barbarians to create a steel ring surrounding the enemy who were caught with half their number on each side of the river (see diagram below).



Aurelian ambushes the Juthungi.

After many of the Juthungi had been killed while attempting the passage of the Danube, the survivors sent envoys to the Romans. We have a full account from a fragment of the *Scythia* of Dexippus.³

The swaggering emissaries were not at all fearful of their fate, concerned merely that the tribute paid to them by earlier emperors might be forfeit. However, Aurelian had determined to set an example. Deliberately he set himself raised high on a dais, cloaked in

purple, while the entire army was arranged around him in the form of a crescent. The officers stood by their horses. Behind Aurelian were displayed all the insignia of the legions – golden eagles, the portraits of emperors past, and the names of great generals displayed in gold letters; the whole paraded on spears made of silver.

Then the Juthungi envoys were commanded to appear. They were struck dumb at the sight and remained for a long time silent. Finally Aurelian gave them leave to speak, which they did through an interpreter. The spokesmen attempted a vainglorious justification of their actions, boasting of the strength upon which they could call (40,000 horsemen and 80,000 footmen altogether, although not all were then present), and that they were prepared for war, trusting in their strength, their fierceness and their ancestors. However, in view of the uncertainty of the outcome, they were willing to offer peace in exchange for restoration of their tribute.

The emperor was not prepared to put up with this nonsense, and replied forthrightly on these lines (shortened and paraphrased):

If you really want peace, why are you demanding money, and then threatening war if you don't get it? But the Romans are skilled at war, and you will fear it. You have grabbed booty by fire and sword and are frustrated only by our power and your rashness. We have already destroyed 300,000 Goths [a reference to Claudius' crushing victory at Mount Haemus in 269/270, in which Aurelian himself had played a major role], and monuments show our glory. Let us not forget either that we have brought swift reprisal to the Alamanni [a reference to their attack during the reign of Gallienus].

Your passage across the Danube into our lands broke the treaty you had with us, although we had done you no injury. Thus we can rely on the offended gods to help us. We cannot predict the outcome of the battle, but we trust in our strength and our ancestors. You, however, are encircled by our men, and time and famine both work against you. Soon you will surrender to us anyway. The whole of your peace petition is nothing, unless a facade to conceal your fear. Given our position of strength, why do we even consider it?

The envoys departed 'greatly dismayed', Dexippus assures us, having hoped with bold words to retain their booty and reclaim their tribute. Aurelian himself departed – he had to attend to the pressing business of getting himself appointed emperor at Rome. The war he left to his generals.

Imagine his frustration, then, when news arrived that some of the

Juthungi had broken out to the rear of the trap, back towards Italy, where they ravaged the area around Mediolanum. Aurelian at once returned to the scene with a flying force of light troops, while the legions followed at their best speed. The barbarians were broken up in a series of minor skirmishes.

There is little chance that Aurelian made the full speech attributed to him and summarized above. It is almost certainly Dexippus' reconstruction of what was actually said. The most noteworthy part of the full quoted speech is the absence of any mention of the current emperor's own successes. This fact alone means that the battle must have occurred at the beginning of Aurelian's reign. Since we know that the invasion by the Juthungi occurred in about August 270, when Claudius had marched to head off the threat before dying in the same month, and that Aurelian seems to have been made emperor in about October 270, it follows that the battle must have occurred in about November. Aurelian was finally able to reach Rome as the undisputed emperor at the end of 270, when his position was confirmed by the reluctant Senate, which, it may be recalled, had previously supported Quintillus. This is the evidence of Zosimus, and is supported by common sense, for new emperors who did not move quickly to get their status confirmed tended to face usurpers. It is also possible that Aurelian did not arrive finally in Rome until the following year (see below).

Immediately, urgent messages reached the new emperor that the Vandals and perhaps Sarmatians were planning to enter the Balkans again by passage across the Danube near Aquincum (modern Budapest). Aurelian at once hastened northwards via Aquileia and into Pannonia, sending instructions ahead for a scorched-earth policy. All food supplies in the provinces of Upper and Lower Pannonia were to be moved at once into the cities there, so that the barbarians – who would never think to bring their own supplies – could not make use of them. All citizens were to be ready to retire smartly into the same walled towns. Then the emperor himself arrived with his army and there resulted a pitched battle with the marauders (c. February or March 271). According to Dexippus, the Vandals were 'utterly defeated' and sued for peace. This time, interestingly, Aurelian consulted his own weary troops as to the measures that should be taken. Again, we have the story from a fragment of Dexippus' history. The emperor invited his troops to examine the enemy camp, and to pick out whether there was anything they wanted to grab for

themselves, but the soldiers decided to opt for a peaceful resolution. The barbarian survivors were permitted to return home empty handed on condition that they refrained from further pillaging, returned the captives that they had taken, furnished high-ranking hostages against their good behaviour – a common practice in Roman times – and also provided 2,000 cavalymen for the Roman army. In exchange, Aurelian guaranteed the main body of Vandals safe passage out of Roman territory, with the local Roman governor providing supplies as far as the Danube. A party of 500 Vandals failed to honour the truce and the culprits were massacred by order of their own king.

Zosimus also records this battle, but seems to have conflated or confused it with the later battle against the Goths late in 271, in which Aurelian and his army would cross the Danube in order to hunt down and destroy the enemy. The battle with the Vandals secured temporarily the Danube frontier, and also made possible the establishment of a market where the barbarians could conduct trade with the province – particularly in red wine, one might guess. For this achievement Aurelian appears to have been awarded the title of *Sarmaticus Maximus*, although this early distinction is surprisingly rare on later inscriptions bearing his name.

German invasion of Italy (spring 271)

At once there arrived advance intelligence of a fresh impending attack on Italy by the Alamanni. Gibbon believes that these were the survivors who had broken out of the ring constructed earlier by the army encircling the Juthungi, but Aurelian would have needed two large armies if one was to be left containing the Juthungi and another to fight the Vandals. Aurelian posted a considerable garrison on the Danube and his army rushed back from Pannonia, although the emperor himself was delayed for a few days. In fact, there was a formidable incursion across the Alps into northern Italy by fresh waves of Alamanni, Marcomanni and Juthungi tribesmen, who had bypassed the garrison at Ariminum on the north-eastern Italian coast before bursting into the fertile Italian plains. Since the Alpine passes are blocked until March, we must assume that the invasion occurred in the spring of 271 unless, as is possible, the snows melted earlier in the warmer seasons of the Roman imperial age.

Aurelian raced back in person from the Danube with a flying cohort of light auxiliaries, while the legions he had sent back earlier arrived in the nick of time after a long march. Saunders⁴ computes that the main Roman army would have needed five days to receive the news of

the fresh invasion, and a further forty days to march from the Danube to northern Italy; thus the events described below must have occurred in about early May 271. The emperor's tactics are unclear despite the several ancient accounts, unusually in general agreement, of what happened next. The Romans may have blocked the retreat of the invaders at a spot near Placentia in north-western Italy, which the Germans had sacked, or they may have been pressing hard on the barbarian heels as they advanced, nibbling them from the rear. Aurelian sent a message to the barbarians, saying: 'If you want to fight, I am prepared, but you would do better to surrender, and I give guarantees as your lord.' Their arrogant reply was: 'We have no lord, and in the morning indeed be prepared, for you will see how free men can fight.' Rather than face an open battle the barbarians retreated into the forests. During the evening they ambushed and severely defeated the Roman army, probably while it was still hastening to the threatened area.

The news caused panic at Rome, where the citizens remembered only too well the invasion of the Alamanni deep into Italy little more than a decade previously. Felicissimus, the mint master there who had been accused of debasing the coinage to pocket some of the silver supplied for the purpose, created a dangerous riot, perhaps aided and abetted by senators who feared the return of Aurelian. Some say that Felicissimus had filed off the emperor's coin marks. It has been conjectured that Aurelian might have threatened to close the mint to end thefts of coins and silver. What we do know, from the evidence of the coins themselves, is that Aurelian's first issue of coins, the *Divus Claudius* series to commemorate his late mentor, the newly deified emperor Claudius, was the worst issue ever for quality, and clearly inferior to output from other mints producing coins for Aurelian.⁵ Another cause of dissatisfaction at Rome would have occurred if the Palmyrenes, controlling Egypt, had stopped the normal despatch in spring of the grain ships to Rome. This would have caused a fear of starvation, but assumes that Queen Zenobia was ready to make the final break with Rome. Her coins issued at this time still acknowledged Aurelian as emperor.

The emergency required that the Senate consult the Sibylline Books again. Yet some of the senators hesitated, for fear that divine aid might lessen the emperor's reputation for which the senators might in turn have to pay. According to the Augustan Histories,⁶ the emperor himself ' marvelled at you, O Senators, to have hesitated so long about

opening the Sibylline Books, as though you were debating in the church of the Christians, and not in the Temple of all the gods.' He went on to offer any sum of money or human or animal sacrifices that might be desired by the rituals. The story is doubtless apocryphal, but gives an insight into the view at least of the pagan writer on key differences between Christianity and the Roman religious tradition.

So the Sibylline Books were at last consulted with the appropriate ceremonies, and two regular festivals, the Ambarvalia and the Amburbium, were brought forward, involving the ritual procession of sacrificial animals that would subsequently be slaughtered. Areas around which the animals had first been paraded could not, according to the prophecies, be passed by the barbarians. The Augustan Histories date the consultation to 11 January 271, but this must be far too early.

Meanwhile, the successful, yet undisciplined Germans had broken into small parties to plunder the north of Italy. The Augustan Histories attribute this to the success of the rituals; we do not know of their effect on the superstitious minds of the barbarians. Aurelian reorganized his forces and dogged the rear of the careless tribesmen as they advanced down the great Aemilian and Flaminian roads leading to the capital from the north-eastern coast of Italy. Thus the Romans were able to deal with the barbarians in small parcels, each attack delivering a shattering blow with overwhelming numbers on the Roman side. Pressed hard, the Alamanni were unable to pillage the towns of Pisaurum and Fanum Fortunae on the Aemilian Way. As they turned westwards onto the Flaminian Way towards Rome, Aurelian caught up the main body and fought a pitched battle by the river Metaurus. The barbarians were pressed into the river and many were drowned. Two inscriptions at Pisaurum and at Fanum Fortunae, which had both miraculously survived the barbarian passage, commemorate the Roman victory. Both were erected by one Gaius Julius Priscianus, an official apparently in charge of the walls now 'in acting command'.⁷ One of the inscriptions associates Aurelian with Hercules, and describes Aurelian tactfully as 'unconquered'; the other believes apparently that Aurelian is 'of eternal victory' (or perhaps is co-dedicated to the eternal goddess Victory).

Few of the raiders would return home across the Alps. For these successes, Aurelian was awarded the title of *Germanicus Maximus*, while *Victoria Germanica* appears on his coins. The victory had strengthened his position against pretenders, and the German tribes

would not trouble Italy again while Aurelian remained emperor. Yet, after centuries of undisturbed peace, this was the third time in twelve years that the defenceless capital city of Rome had nearly been seized by barbarians. The new emperor determined not to leave Italy again until after he had fortified Rome.

The alternative view

Many modern historians, including the great Gibbon, have remarked on the similarities of the invasions of the Juthungi at the end of 270 and of the Alamanni at the beginning of 271.⁸ Could Aurelian really have had time to mop up both invasions and to deal with the Vandals in between? The alternative view is that the confused ancient descriptions of the invasion by the Juthungi and the Alamanni really describe the same event, probably occurring after Aurelian's rough handling of the Vandals. If this is the case then the surviving fragments of Dexippus, the most reliable historian of that period, need rearrangement of their order and Dexippus has confused the river Danube with the Metaurus. The problem remains unresolved.

Aurelian visits Rome⁹

Aurelian could not wait to mop up the remnants of the Germans in view of the uprising in his rear. He marched straight on to Rome (c. June 271) where the mint-worker rebellion on the Caelian Hill was suppressed in heavy fighting. Allegedly some 7,000 combatants were killed, and the output from the mint was interrupted. Aurelian now turned his wrath on those thought to be behind the rebellion, and a number of senators lost their lives (Zosimus claims three deaths), while others had their properties confiscated. One of the senators to be executed was he who had previously advised Aurelian to use 'gold and iron' – as the 'Continuator of Dio' tells us, he tasted the iron of his own recommendation. The same source describes how the ex-consul of 263, M. Nummius Albinus, old, bed-ridden and terminally ill, was asked how he hoped things would turn out. 'If the Fatherland is well,' he said, 'to be sure I will die unwillingly. However, if things turn out otherwise, I die gladly. For I would rather perish than learn of the Fatherland overthrown.' These two snippets are all that survive from the original lengthy account, by the Continuator of Dio, concerning the reaction of the patriotic aristocracy to the arrival of Aurelian. The loss of the bulk of this source must be accounted a serious blow to modern history. The reliable fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus alone informs us in colourful language that, after Aurelian had found the treasury in Rome empty after the 'deplorable' events of

the emperor Gallienus, he ‘fell upon the rich like a tidal wave.’

The problems at the mint at Rome were dealt with by temporary measures. Gaius Valerius Sabinus replaced Felicissimus as the mint master in 271 and evidently held Aurelian’s confidence. He would be retained for at least three years in his post according to the evidence of inscriptions.¹⁰ The mint at Rome was closed and its operations moved to the mint at Mediolanum. The new output of ‘silver’ coins returned to the marginally superior output seen under Gallienus. It seems that Aurelian also removed the right of senators to mint bronze coinage at Rome, an old prerogative distinguished by the letters ‘SC’ – *senatus consulto* (by decree of the Senate) – on the coins themselves. Such senatorial issues become very rare thereafter, and appear to have been restricted to ceremonial use.¹¹

This author purchased cheaply two silvered coins of Aurelian from a large find that had been newly excavated. These coins, and their similar fellows, were apparently too substandard to be of any value to a numismatist, and were offered for sale at a government tourist office on the Via dei Fori Imperiali, adjacent to the original Roman Forum. The coins were identical and very small, and must have dated from the first or second years of Aurelian’s rule. On the front had been stamped IMP AURELIANUS AUG and on the reverse CONCORDUM MILITUM (with agreement of the soldiers) while the same coin face depicted the god Jupiter handing a globe to the emperor. The coins and mint marks correspond exactly to catalogue number RIC 342 in Mattingly’s classification for Aurelian, produced from the mint at Cyzicus. It would have been interesting to discover how the coins ended up for sale at Rome.

The standard of manufacture of the coins is very poor, and both had been so cut that in fact much of the inscription quoted above was missing. What remained of the inscriptions was difficult to read owing to the inadequate quality of the lettering. The face of the emperor lacked any real detail at all; the usual radiate head looked as though it might have been well worn and was virtually unrecognizable. Yet the coins as purchased were brightly silvered. Exposed to the air in my home, they tarnished quickly and within a few months were very dark. If the coins being produced at the Roman mint in 270–271 were worse than these, they must have been truly dreadful.

Some opportunists thought that Aurelian could not survive as emperor after the disaster with the Alamanni and the disturbances at Rome; they decided to stake their own claims to the throne. Septimius

rebelled in Dalmatia, Domitianus (perhaps Gallienus' old general who had previously defeated the Macriani) in southern Gaul. Urbanus also mutinied; we are not told where. All these rebellions were quickly extinguished. Zosimus places the insurrections between Aurelian's arrival at Rome and his attack on Palmyra.

There is very little information about these usurpers, and Zosimus, a reliable fifth-century historian, was until recently the only definite source. The rebellion of Septimius is also mentioned by the *Epitome de Caesaribus* (end fourth century). The Augustan Histories, normally so ready to come up with details of pseudoemperors, surprisingly have no data on these insurrections at all. It has even been suggested¹² that 'Urbanus' is a generic name for the leader of an uprising at the Urbs (City of Rome). In support of this idea, Polemius Silvius¹³ cites the mint master Felicissimus as one of the 'tyrants' (rebels) against Aurelian. However, in the year 1900 a poor quality coin was found in the Loire Valley, issued in the name of Domitianus. The details appeared to have been stamped over another emperor's image, and the coin was taken to be a modern forgery. Soon after, it disappeared mysteriously.

Recently, this coin was rediscovered in a small museum at Nantes and was undergoing critical re-examination when, on 24 February 2004, the British Museum revealed a coin that it declared to be 'sensational'. It had been found as part of a hoard in a field near Oxford, England, and had originally been a late third-century *antoninianus* with a silver wash. The silver had deteriorated, leaving the stamped bronze image of a Roman emperor's face, hitherto unrecognized but of the 'radiate' style typical of the second half of the third century. The inscription is *Imp(erator) C(aesar) Domitianus P(ius) F(elix) Aug(ustus)*, providing the very first direct evidence that Domitianus had actually gone so far as to declare himself emperor (see coin portrait illustration number 20 in the plate section.) The French coin has since been shown to have been stamped from the same die as the Oxford coin.

This discovery vindicates Zosimus' text, and renders much more plausible the existence of the otherwise unknown Septimius and Urbanus. Domitianus must have been serving in the Alps as a frontier general, perhaps at Cularo, as most of Gaul was still held by the Gallic-Roman Empire. The hypothesis that he was a rebel against that empire, rather than against Aurelian, complicates unnecessarily the evidence of Zosimus.

It was at this time that Aurelian earned his reputation for ruthlessness. He had been emperor for some nine months by now, and had not enjoyed a moment's freedom from fighting foreign or domestic enemies. Some said that the senators had been killed on charges that were trivial or unsubstantiated, others that Aurelian might be a good healer, but his cures were bad or, at any rate, too bloody. As Vopiscus puts it: 'The most excellent emperor began to be feared, not to be loved.'

His character

Aurelian was not a new crusader, seeking to overturn existing conventions and establish some kind of 'better way'. On the contrary, he was a deeply conservative man of originally farming stock, whose principal desire was simply to restore the Roman Empire to the golden age that had existed in his youth, he would recollect, during the reign of Severus Alexander. He showed the greatest reverence for tradition and for the Senate – provided it behaved itself – and his main concerns were to stamp out corruption and to restore discipline to the army. We might perhaps call him a fervent Roman patriot.

It is evident that the new emperor now took great pains to maintain friendly relations with the Senate, and to reward loyalty. Several senior senators are known to have taken consulships during Aurelian's reign, including T. Pomponius Bassus, the 'leading man' of Claudius' reign who now was granted the honour of sharing Aurelian's first consulship, and Julius Placidianus, who had held the garrison at Cularo for Claudius, and who may have been instrumental in the suppression of the recent Gallic rebellion of Domitianus. Inscriptions show that those who served in one position under Aurelian frequently reappear with other important posts later in his reign.¹⁴ Aurelian was loyal to his supporters, and in turn inspired great loyalty in them. There would be no more rebellions against his rule.

Aurelian's attitude towards military discipline and official corruption was much fiercer. If the carrot did not work, there was always the stick or, perhaps, if the 'gold' did not avail, there was always 'iron'. His strength of purpose and fiery temper were remarked upon by all the ancient writers. Here are some of their views:

- 'Effective in war, unrestrained temper, excessively cruel.' (Eutropius)
- 'Ferocious, blood-thirsty, necessary rather than kind at all. Always harsh.' (Eutropius)

- ‘Severe and incorruptible.’ (Victor)
- ‘Stern, savage, blood-thirsty.’ (Vopiscus; similar in *Epitome De Caesaribus*)
- ‘Was not accustomed to threaten in vain, nor, if he did threaten, to pardon.’ (Vopiscus)

According to the Augustan Histories, Aurelian’s own slaves and menservants who committed crimes were killed in the emperor’s presence, to maintain order and, many said, out of sheer cruelty. One maid who had been found guilty of adultery was put to death; a soldier who had so acted had previously been torn asunder from two trees. There can be no doubt that Aurelian exercised the fiercest control over morality and military discipline. The armies had been increasingly a law unto themselves and the new emperor’s drastic tightening of control was declared on coins, where Aurelian is proclaimed as *Restitutor Exerciti* (Restorer of the Army).

Early on, Aurelian was required to quell a mutiny among some fractious troops. He addressed them in person and took a hard line. Lifting his purple cloak with his right hand, he declared that god (Jupiter or, later, the Sun) alone could bestow the purple. It was for god alone to determine the length of rule of his chosen one, and not even fifty mutinies like theirs could divert this divine will.¹⁵

We know that Aurelian had a wife, Ulpia Severina, but it seems that he married her in 274. She will be described in [chapter 7](#). There was also at least one sister, Domitia. Family ties must have been put to a severe test when the relentless emperor ordered one of his own relatives killed. It may have been his sister’s son or his sister’s daughter; the literature is confused and no reason is stated anywhere. However, there had already been at least three rebellions against his rule. According to common rules of naming children, a son of Domitia, and thereby the nephew of Aurelian, would likely have been named Domitianus and might perhaps be identified with the rebel of the same name.

Yet, as we shall see, he was capable of showing great clemency towards vanquished enemies. It is not clear from the ancient historians whether this represented a triumph of compassion or of policy, but in either case it meant that potential enemies were always willing to throw themselves on his mercy rather than trust to taking up arms against his well-publicized military skills. Moreover, there is no doubt that he was much loved by his own army despite his fearsome reputation for discipline. There was never a serious army rebellion

against his rule.

We know little of Aurelian's personal tastes. It is likely that his hero was his adoptive forebear, the emperor Trajan. The Augustan Histories tell us that he enjoyed best a simple glass of red wine. He liked actors on the stage and was fascinated by a professional eater who devoured fabulous quantities of food in front of him. When he was ill, he never called a doctor but treated himself, usually by fasting. The Romans had great confidence in the beneficial effects of 'purging the system' by abstinence from food.

Maintaining a long tradition, Aurelian awarded himself his first consulship on 1 January 271 with 'Bassus', widely believed to be T. Pomponius Bassus, the leading man of Claudius' reign. Indeed, this consul would almost certainly have been appointed by Claudius himself, since consular elections were customarily held in the preceding July while Claudius was still alive. Aurelian may have taken steps to strengthen the heavy cavalry force that Gallienus had initiated. As their former commander he must have had expert knowledge and a lively interest, although he appears always to have used light cavalry in the few actions of which we still have a record. There is no direct evidence that Aurelian created any heavy *clibanarii* cavalry units, although he probably created the *Equites Promoti Clibanarii Comitatusenses*, which still existed at the end of the fourth century.¹⁶ It was the custom for emperors to name new or reorganized army units after themselves. Inscriptions¹⁷ record a *Cohors Plimasensis Aureliana* and a Legio III Augusta Aureliana, as well as an imperial guard, the *Protectores Aureliani Augusti*.

He must also have made many key military and civilian appointments, but the literature records very few: Bonosus, known only from the Augustan Histories, was allegedly esteemed as a military commander and would in later years come to command the critical Raetian frontier. However, Aurelian's recorded description of this man was 'Born to drink, not to live', and he provided Bonosus with a wife, a Gothic noblewoman, so that he could go and spy on the Goths' conversations while drinking with them. The woman had been supplied as a hostage by the Vandals who had surrendered to Aurelian near the Danube at the beginning of his reign.

Mucapor was a high-ranking officer and a member of the headquarters staff. Pompeianus would be commander against the Palmyrene Empire. Probus became commander of the Tenth Legion, presumably Legio X Gemina in Pannonia, and later led the naval

invasion force that recaptured Egypt before being appointed to command of the Rhine armies. Saturninus was appointed to command of the eastern frontier, provided that he never set foot in Egypt. This province, the main supplier of corn to Rome, and with a reputation for disturbances among its peoples, was deemed by all the emperors to be of special significance. The emperor in person long reserved for himself the right to be governor of Egypt. Marcellinus was prefect of Mesopotamia in 273, and governor of all the Orient. Although cited only by Zosimus, he was probably a knight like all other known holders of this post, and almost certainly the same person as Aurelian's coconsul in 275. Sotgiu¹⁸ believes him to have been the 'Aurelius Marcellinus *vir perfectissimus dux ducenarius*' who supervised the construction of Verona's wall under Gallienus, in 265. A more plausible alternative is that he was the Julius Marcellinus who had served in about 270–271 as governor of Egypt (see below). Bickerman suggests T. Nonius Marcellinus (see [Appendix B](#)).

The urban prefects of Rome are known from one of the documents of the 'Calendar of 354'.¹⁹ These prefects controlled the city troops at Rome, to maintain order, and the office was established by Augustus using those senators who had already been consuls. Thus the position of urban prefect was the pinnacle of a senator's career, might be held for up to three years, and was often followed by another consulship. Flavius Antiochus held the position in 269 and 270; Postumius Varus in 271, who probably died in office, since he was replaced by Pomponius Bassus, the consul of the same year; Antiochus again in 272 (suggesting perhaps illness in 271); Virius Orfitus in 273 and 274; and Postumius Suagrus in 275.

A few other senior officials, such as provincial governors, are known from contemporary inscriptions. Their status was becoming increasingly merged through the third century by use of the generic title *praeses* to encompass governors who could be either knights or senators, and regardless of their official position.

Strategies

At long last Aurelian had time to take stock of his position:

1. The frontiers were for the time being quiet, and free from serious threat of barbarian incursions.
2. Queen Zenobia ruled the eastern part of the Roman Empire, and

was becoming more and more ambitious.

3. The breakaway Gallic–Roman Empire now comprised only Gaul and Britain but still held many of the best Roman troops in garrisons along the Rhine frontier.

The fact that Aurelian controlled neither the eastern nor the western parts of the empire meant that, on the one hand, he lacked their resources, such as tax revenue and troops, while, on the other hand, the breakaway empires posed a threat to his own rule, which meant that he could never deploy his entire army against any one barbarian menace. Gallienus had tried to restore the whole realm, but had failed. The time was now ripe for a further attempt to be made. Reunification would make the whole empire better able to withstand barbarian attacks.

A quick count of the legions known to have existed at this time exemplifies the problem. Aurelian himself now commanded the following legions: I and II Adiutrix; I, II, III Italica; VII, X, XIII, XIV Gemina; VII and XI Claudia; III Augusta; IV Flavia Felix; V Macedonia; II Parthica – a total of fifteen legions. Of these, no fewer than ten were stretched along the Danube (including the provinces of Raetia and Noricum), with another two north of that river in Dacia. Roman forces in the east, nominally under the control of Queen Zenobia, amounted to twelve legions, although their loyalty to the queen would be doubtful. The Gallic Empire commanded seven legions, of which three were deployed in Britain. The complexity of the situation can be discovered from the fact that Aurelian's legion XIII Gemina, supposedly stationed in Dacia, had vexillations at the command of the Gallic Empire. Indeed, the legion had received commendations from both Gallienus and Victorinus (of the Gallic Empire) within the space of a few years! The loyalty of XIV Gemina in Pannonia was also suspect, having changed sides from Gallienus to the pretender Regalianus, back to Gallienus when Postumus seceded, and to Victorinus by 271. Victorinus had newly been murdered and replaced by Tetricus as commander of the Gallic Empire.

What to do first? Aurelian at present commanded only one third of the empire's resources. He certainly could not undertake a war on two fronts. It is likely that events in the breakaway empires made up Aurelian's mind for him, as we shall see, but it would have been a logical decision anyway to take on Zenobia's kingdom first as it

controlled more wealth than the Roman and Gallic empires put together, and so more gold and silver with which to restore the shattered western economies and to pay the army. Moreover, all the grain for the Roman population had traditionally been supplied from Egypt, now under Zenobia's sway.

After the death of two short-lived emperors, combined with various power struggles in the army, the Rhine armies had appointed C. Pius Esuvius Tetricus, allegedly a civilian, to hold the purple for the Gallic–Roman state in the spring or summer of 271. Tetricus was governor of the province of Aquitania and resident at Burdigala (Bordeaux) on the west coast of Gaul at the time, and he may have moved his court there. Tetricus' reign was strewn with internal dissensions, perhaps even mutinies, according to Orosius, and it appears that his heart was not in his new position. It is likely that he was in correspondence with Aurelian; certainly the latter felt it safe to leave the Gallic Empire to its own devices for a while, perhaps calculating that the rebels in any case possessed too few troops to threaten Rome.

As already recounted, the Palmyrene Empire had been flexing its muscles during the short reign of Claudius. Queen Zenobia now controlled the important Roman eastern provinces of Syria and Egypt. The mint at Antioch had issued coins in the name of Aurelian (*Augustus*, i.e. emperor, therefore senior) and Vaballathus (King, *Imperator, Dux*) from December 270,²⁰ but Aurelian's tactical blunder against the Alamanni in spring 271 had far-reaching consequences. As well as the handful of pretenders, listed above and speedily overthrown, Zenobia and her young son Vaballathus now started to project their own claims. The Palmyrene monarchs in spring 271 backdated the accession of Vaballathus to the death of his father Odaenathus in 268; thus Vaballathus appeared to be senior to Aurelian in terms of years of reign, where now he appears on coins also as *Augustus*. The complications of dating Egyptian papyri at this time are described in [chapter 7](#). Coins from August 271 and an Egyptian papyrus dated 17 April 272 (Egyptian equivalent) are dated: 'The second year of the emperor (Aurelian) and fifth year of (Vaballathus)'; the papyrus adds for Vaballathus: 'most glorious king, consul, emperor, general of the Romans'.²¹ Milestones erected in the area controlled by the Palmyrenes show the name of Vaballathus, but not of Aurelian. Slowly, the name of Aurelian fades away from official inscriptions in the east.



Roman Empire in AD 271.

Zenobia herself claimed to be a descendant of Cleopatra. She was also addressed as 'Cleopatra', at least by Callinicus of Petra in his dedication to her of his ten-book history of Alexandria.²² She was, we are told by the Augustan Histories, of 'incredible' beauty, with penetrating black eyes, a face dark and swarthy, and pure-white teeth. Possessed of a proud spirit, she was stern when necessary, merciful when possible. She was a keen huntswoman who spoke little Latin, but read Greek as well as using her Syrian native tongue. Her three sons, claimed to be Herodes, Herennianus (Vaballathus) and Timolaus, had been raised to understand Latin, and knew little Greek. (In fact, her three sons by Odaenathus are believed to have been, in order of birth, Hairan, probably the Herodes of the Histories, Vaballathus, and Herodianus, thought to have died soon after Odaenathus.) An inscription²³ for Vaballathus cites him as *Corrector Totius Orientis* (governor of the entire east), but why he is so titled is unknown, unless it is an echo of the award to his father Odaenathus by Gallienus of the title *Dux Totius Orientis*. It is certain that Aurelian would never have made such a gesture.

Privately, the family lived in oriental style, but the queen adopted the manner of a Roman emperor when she appeared in public. She promoted religious tolerance, so that Christianity and the Roman gods flourished in the east as well as the Palmyrene cults of worship of the Sun and of Bel. Zenobia was also a keen fan of Greek culture, and she was assisted by a learned adviser, Cassius Longinus, who had been born c. 213. Longinus was a Greek rhetorician and Neoplatonic

philosopher who had taught at Athens for about thirty years. After the sack of Athens, he moved in about the year 267 to Rome, but was soon enticed by Queen Zenobia to transfer again to Palmyra, where he became her chief counsellor and tutor to her sons. He wrote many books about philosophy, though few now survive.

Zenobia, in the name of Vaballathus, now attempted to seize all Asia Minor (271). By the end of the spring most of the provinces were in their hands, but Bithynia and the city of Chalcedon remained uncaptured, while the mint at Cyzicus continued to produce coins for Aurelian. Probably they wished to create an 'Independent Eastern Empire' to rival the 'Independent Gallic Empire' of Tetricus. Zenobia, then, was for all the reasons stated above to be the first target.

At this time, the Palmyrenes seem still to have been feeling their way cautiously, while trying to avoid a direct provocation to the central Roman authority. They could simply have cut off the corn supplies from Egypt to Rome, but that would have been tantamount to a declaration of war and would have invited direct retaliation, and there is no evidence that they did so. Instead, we know from papyri that a certain Julius Marcellinus had been appointed in Egypt as the acting prefect, after his predecessor Tenagino Probus had died in action trying to block the Palmyrene capture of his province. Then, shortly before 29 August 271, a new prefect, Statilius Ammianus, was appointed. This illustrious and well-documented Roman had previously served as a military officer in the neighbouring province of Arabia, before becoming prefect of the same province in 263–264. It seems that his new position in Egypt represented a joint agreement between Rome and Palmyra to find a suitable compromise candidate for the job.

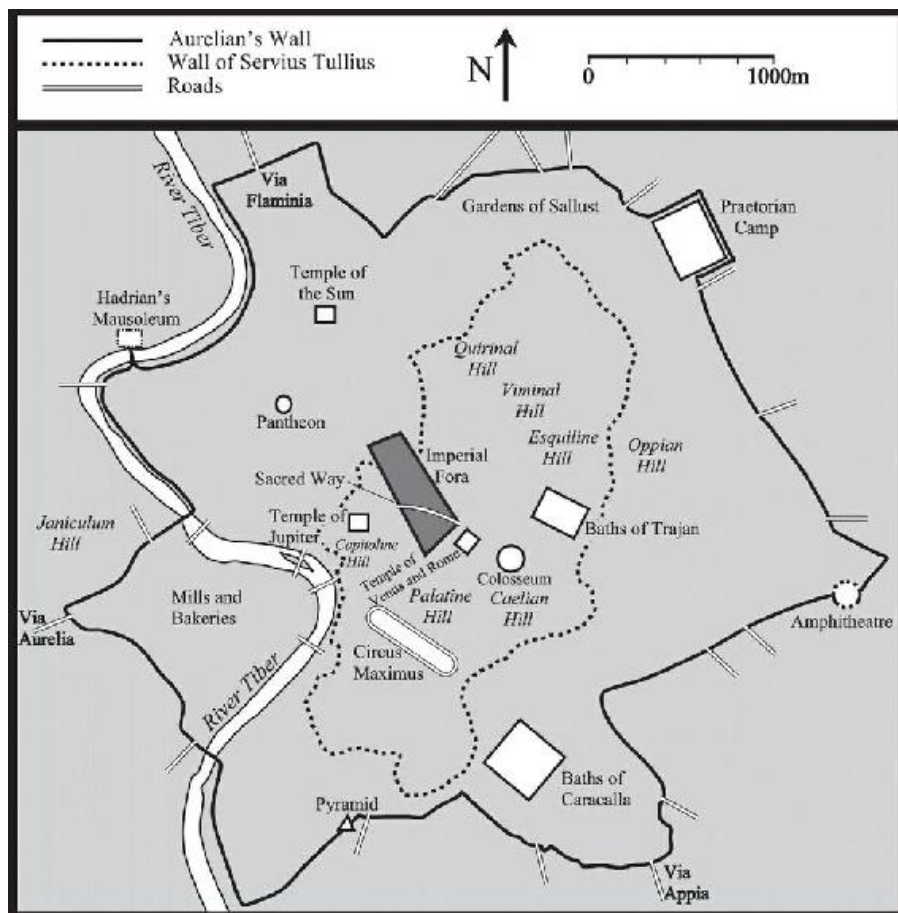
Similarly, Virius Lupus was appointed governor of the province of Asia for 271–272.²⁴ His position too was vague, for Zenobia claimed most of Asia for herself. Lupus had previously served under Gallienus and Odaenathus as the governor of the province of Syria Coele.

Aurelian's wall of Rome²⁵

Because Aurelian planned to be away from Rome for some time, and the temper of the barbarians was uncertain, he felt it necessary to make proper provision for the defence of the capital city against another incursion by would-be plunderers. There had been barbarian attacks on Italy in 259, when the Alamanni nearly reached Rome, in 268 and in 271. The old wall named after Servius Tullius from the days of the Roman Republic failed to encompass the densely

populated city, whose population had fallen from its peak, but was still at least of half a million people. It was therefore necessary to build another wall, and for this Aurelian enlisted the aid of the Senate.

Work on the new city wall began in 271, but the pressing military needs of the time meant that the wall was constructed predominantly by civilian labour. The wall had to be created in some haste and, for speed of construction, incorporated many existing monuments such as Hadrian's huge mausoleum and the Egyptian-style pyramid built earlier (c. 18–12 BC) by the senator Gaius Cestius as a tomb. Aurelian's wall was built on foundations that were 13 feet (4 metres) deep, with a core of soft volcanic tufa aggregates, cross-running lines of tiles for binding, cemented with concrete and faced with reused bricks, and was finally finished, we are told, during the reign of the emperor Probus (276–282). If this is correct, then Rome's wall was built far more slowly than that of other cities; Saunders²⁶ estimates at best (assuming completion in 276) c. 300 metres/month, compared for example with the 926 metres/month required to build the wall around Verona. The failure of the state-owned brick-making industry to provide the necessary raw materials for the wall has been taken as an indication of one of the economic failures of the time. The work was of uneven quality, reflecting the varying standards of workmanship. In some places, the wall does not even join up with reused older constructions, and it is supposed that there must once have been wooden bridging.



Plan of the City of Rome.

The new wall followed generally the old customs boundary, where taxes were levied on goods going in and out of the city, and may have created its own new customs line. The Janiculum area west of the river Tiber held many water mills for the production of flour. The mills had probably been introduced under the reforms of Severus Alexander to supply bread to Rome's population, and were powered by one or both of the major viaducts that crossed the area. The importance of these mills can be gauged readily from the fact that Aurelian's wall crossed the Tiber to enclose them, and the peculiar line of part of the wall that follows exactly two branches of the aqueducts. Another large extension had to be made to encompass the barracks of the Praetorian Guard. The wall ran also along the river bank. When complete, the wall was 11 feet 9 inches (3.6 metres) thick, 21 feet 4 inches (6.5 metres) high and 11.2 miles (18 kilometres) in circumference. The Augustan Histories claim that the wall was '50 milia' long. This has been translated as '50 miles' in the

past, and would represent a ridiculous exaggeration, but an alternative translation is '50,000' feet, equivalent to 9.5 miles (15.3 kilometres). There were 381 artillery towers, spaced at 30 metres, for Roman military catapults that could not hit enemies sheltering close to the wall. The top of the walls could be reached only by access through the towers. There were no towers along the river wall, which would be described by Procopius in the sixth century as a major weakness.

This huge construction was completed without disturbance from barbarian tribes, against whom it was intended to provide only a temporary defence. Such a giant circumference could hardly withstand a determined siege by professional troops equipped with the latest siege machinery, but could stop an ill-disciplined barbarian rabble from breaking in suddenly. Equally, the presence of the new wall could not prevent a determined besieging force from starving out the occupants, but barbarians rarely tarried in their search for plunder, and in any case the wall was required only to delay the external enemy until the emperor could hurry back with his main army.

The wall would be inadequate against Roman legions. Little more than thirty years after its completion, the usurper Maxentius would double the height of the walls against the army of his rival Constantine. The imposing walls that we see today are predominantly those of Maxentius, although parts of Aurelian's original construction are still visible. Moreover, the manpower demands of the 381 artillery towers for catapults and their crews were such that later defenders preferred to employ archers. There were originally no fewer than twenty-nine entrances through the walls, a serious structural defect. Four great gates guarded the four main roads in and out of Rome; twelve lesser gates served the secondary roads. The remainder defended lesser roads or even access to private houses, and would be blocked up by Maxentius. After all this effort, Maxentius nevertheless sent out his army to face Constantine in 312, when it would be defeated heavily. Maxentius had believed that he had received a favourable omen; that he would conquer if he attacked at once from an unfavourable position across the river.

Although the wall had been extended far beyond the confines of that of Servius Tullius (see diagram on [page 84](#)), Aurelian did not yet extend the *pomerium*, the ceremonial boundary of the city inside which auspices were taken. Traditionally, this could be extended only by a Roman who had annexed foreign territory. The last had been the emperor Trajan about 170 years previously, and Aurelian had yet to

manage such an accomplishment.

Wall building had not been up till now a regular feature for all Roman towns, although it would shortly become so. Walls surrounding other cities followed the general pattern of that built for Rome, but were smaller. At this time Aurelian was more interested in improving communications, and several, perhaps all, of the major Roman roads linking his part of the empire were put into good repair.

The Goths tamed

Having put all civil affairs into good order, and having arranged for Rome's defences, Aurelian himself set out with huge forces, doubtless comprising the army's elite units including the heavy cavalry, in the autumn (probably September) of 271 towards the east. The army's advance into Asia Minor was interrupted when it arrived in the Balkans, in order to clear out more Gothic invaders from Thrace and adjoining provinces. The intruders had made a bad mistake in choosing to invade at that time. With his large army, Aurelian was minded to cross the Danube and chase the barbarians; the latter took huge casualties in a series of major engagements during the course of which the Gothic leader Cannabaudes was killed. For these victories, the Senate awarded Aurelian the title *Gothicus Maximus*. The emperor issued coins with the legend *Victoria Gothica*.

This was a major victory over the Goths, reinforcing those previously delivered by Gallienus in 268 and Claudius in 270, and it is interesting to speculate whether it was the fact of Aurelian carrying the war into their own lands that determined the lengthy peace that followed. Far too often, the barbarians had been able to make raids of their own time and choosing, and then melt back into their homelands if things went wrong. The Gothic intrusions had finally been checked for decades, according to the reliable late fourth-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus. The termination of these incessant invasions must count as one of Aurelian's greatest achievements, although the Gothic historian Jordanes prefers to omit any mention of these crushing defeats from his highly biased sixth-century account of his compatriots' history.

By 13 January 272, Aurelian was at Byzantium, where he issued a legal opinion (a 'rescript') with that date and location.²⁷

Reorganization of the Danube provinces (271 or 273)

The Roman province of Dacia had been conquered almost 170 years earlier by the emperor Trajan, as a mountainous buffer state between

the barbarians and the Roman provinces south of the river Danube. This had not been a great success: the province had been weakened under the rule of Gallienus, and the long line of its border tied up an excessive number of Roman troops garrisoned there predominantly in small forts and watch towers. Furthermore, the provinces south of the Danube had been ‘devastated’ and ‘ruined’ (Vopiscus) by barbarian incursions. Thus Dacia was not even a useful buffer state, as recent barbarian invasions had been largely seaborne. Aurelian therefore made the strategic decision to abandon Dacia. All troops, and all those civilians who wished to move, were relocated to a newly created province south of the Danube. The method of movement is unclear, for Cassius Dio²⁸ tells us that Trajan’s old military bridge by now comprised only piers and the Danube is half a mile wide at this point. Apparently, whereas Trajan had wanted a fast means to reinforce his troops from south of the Danube, his more cautious successor Hadrian had feared that the same bridge might offer an equally fast route for invading barbarians to cross the river from the north, and had removed the planking. Presumably many boats were used to evacuate Dacia.

This must have been a difficult decision for the emperor, involving not only the obvious loss of Roman prestige but the abandonment of a territory created by his adoptive predecessor, Trajan. The new province of Dacia Ripensis was carved out of the existing provinces of Upper and Lower Moesia and from Thrace. Diocletian (284–305) would later divide this province, like most others, into two: Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea. A single, restored inscription from 283 claims that two Dacias existed at that time,²⁹ but this is now thought to be either an error of restoration or reflects the fact that the original Dacia had been tripartite while sharing only one governor.

In any event, the operation repopulated the southern bank of the Danube. The capital of the new ‘Dacia’ was placed at Serdica (modern Sofia), and a mint was opened there. Many of the original Dacians elected to remain in the abandoned province (there is no archaeological evidence for a sudden large influx of settlers into the new Dacia), where they created a friendly trade and buffer zone in which the barbarians might become civilized. They retained the Latin language for daily use. Even the modern name, Romania, of this abandoned province reflects its history. Cizek³⁰ believes that Romanization took such root among the native Dacians because they were never exposed to the ‘manic bureaucratic oppression’ and

‘taxatory fury’ of the later Roman Empire.

The year in which this resettlement occurred has been hotly disputed, with dates from 270 to 274 being advanced.³¹ Logic suggests that the abandonment of the original province would have occurred either in 271, when Aurelian was moving against Palmyra and therefore needed every spare legion on which he could lay his hands, or possibly in 272 or 273, after the Carpi tribe had caused disturbances in the same area (see [chapter 6](#)). However, many coin hoards have been found in Romania, which date to 272/273, and may represent measures by the remaining locals against the uncertainty created by the Carpi. The summer months would surely have been preferred over the winter for such a large-scale resettlement; no commander would have wished to expose legions and civilians to the hazards of snow and a flooded Danube.

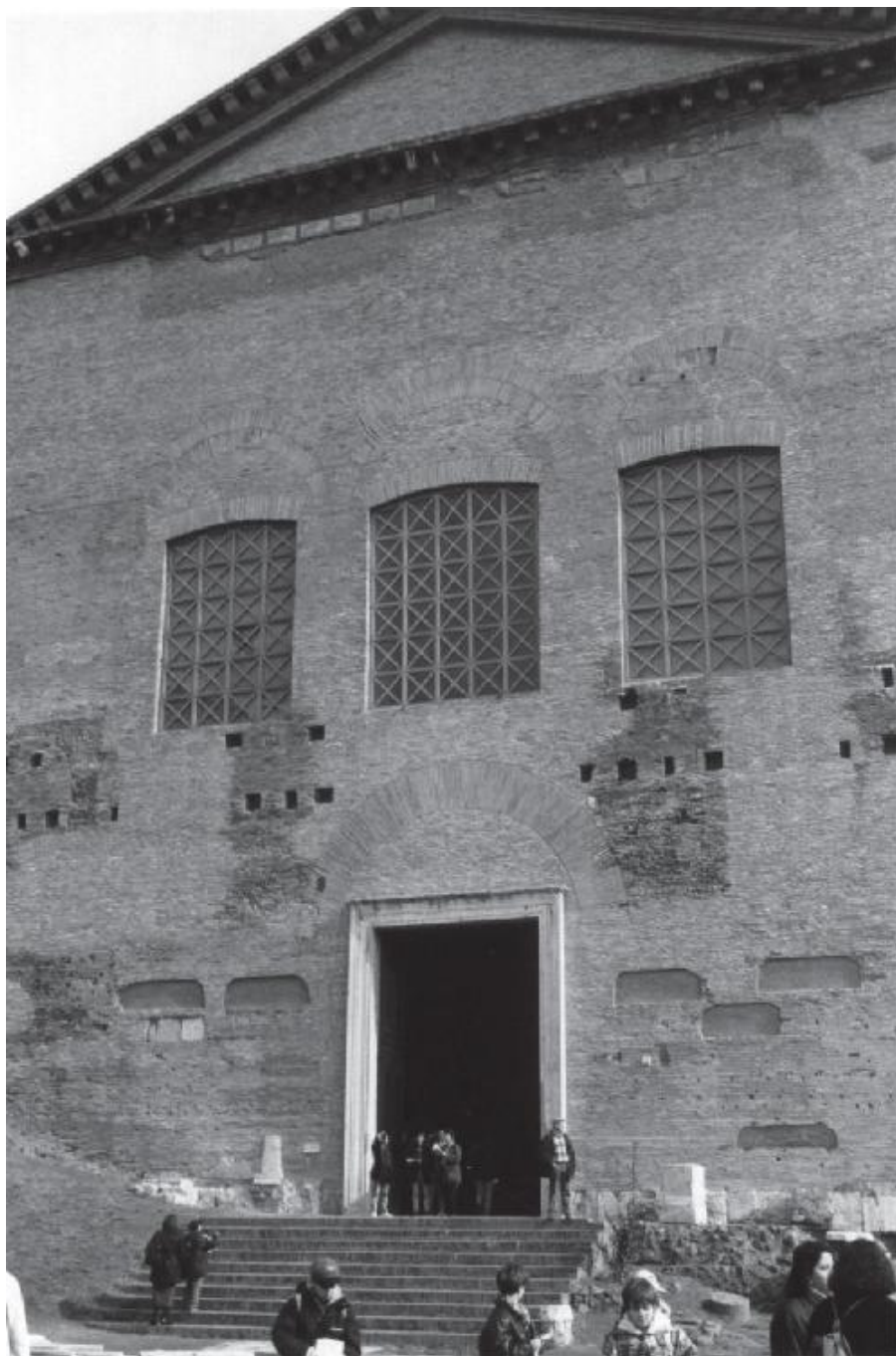
Whatever the date of the evacuation of Dacia, the two legions once stationed there (V Macedonia and XIII Gemina) were now available south of the Danube, in the new province of Dacia, to augment the existing ten legions already guarding the Danube frontier. Aurelian also circulated coins bearing the legend ‘*Dacia Felix*’ (fortunate) and adopted the title *Dacicus Maximus*. It was long believed that these were propaganda exercises, to disguise the loss of face involved in the evacuation, but in recent years it has been determined that the coins date from the first year of Aurelian’s reign and therefore could have had nothing to do with the evacuation. The single known inscription bearing the legend *Dacicus Maximus* dates from late in Aurelian’s reign and cannot reflect his defeat of the Carpi who occupied the original province of Dacia, as the inscription claims both *Carpicus Maximus* and *Dacicus Maximus* for the emperor. Instead the title may acknowledge a second victory over the Goths, who moved into the original Dacia at about this time, given that the title *Gothicus Maximus* was, so to speak, already taken.



Aurelian's Province of Dacia Ripensis.



1. View down the remains of the Roman Forum in Rome. To the extreme left are the remains of the Temple of Saturn.



2. The Senate House, in the Roman Forum, faithfully restored by Diocletian after the original had been destroyed in a fire in AD 283.



3. Overview of the remains of Palmyra. *Dr St John Simpson, British Museum*



4. Close-up view of the centre of Palmyra. *Dr St John Simpson, British Museum*



5. Imposing gatehouse defending Aurelian's Wall at Rome.



6. Aurelian's Wall, with a defensive tower. The top half was completed by Maxentius.



7. A different gate in Aurelian's Wall, seen from above and behind.



8. Part of the Sacred Way in the Forum at Rome. The Sacred Way continued left and upwards to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, now replaced by a museum.



9. Alleged triumphal arch (AD 264) of Gallienus in Rome – see [chapter III](#). The arch is now thought to be the Esquiline Gate, repaired by Gallienus.



10. Valerian (253–260). The last senatorial emperor. © *British Museum*



11. Gallienus (253–268). Valerian's son, under whom the empire almost disintegrated. © *British Museum*



12. Postumus (260–268). Rebel against Gallienus and emperor of the Gallic-Roman Empire. © *British Museum*



13. Claudius II (268–270). Highly regarded emperor general who crushed the Gothic invasion. © *British Museum*



14. Zenobia (268–272). Rebel queen of Palmyra and the eastern Roman Empire. © *British Museum*



15. Vaballathus (268–272). Son of Zenobia, nominal ruler of the eastern Roman Empire. © *British Museum*



16. Single Palmyrene coin showing Aurelian (left) as emperor on one side and Vaballathus (right) as co-emperor on the other. © *CNG Coins/Wildwinds Coins*



17. Aurelian (270–275). Emperor general who reunited the empire. He re-invigorated the army and reformed the currency. © *British Museum*



18. Aurelian. © *British Museum*



19. Quintillus (270). Brother and short-lived successor of Claudius II.
© CNG Coins/Wildwinds Coins



20. Domitian (c.271). Rebel against Aurelian. © *British Museum*



21. Tetricus (271–274). Successor to Postumus and emperor of the Gallic-Roman Empire. © *British Museum*



22. Tacitus (276). Short-lived emperor who by general consent succeeded Aurelian. © CNG Coins/Wildwinds Coins



23. Probus (276–282). Emperor general who repulsed large-scale barbarian invasions. © *British Museum*



24. Carus (282–283). Emperor who overcame the Persians, restoring the empire to its largest desired extent. © *British Museum*



25. Diocletian (284–305). Emperor general who instituted many administrative reforms. © *British Museum*



26. Constantine (306–337). Emperor general who made Christianity the State religion. © *British Museum*

Chapter Six

Aurelian in the East

Zenobia and the Palmyrene Empire¹

Aurelian probably spent the winter of 271/272 in quarters in the Balkans. He would not attempt to move an army across enemy territory until the spring, when supplies and supply lines would be easier. Zenobia currently occupied Asia Minor, Egypt and Syria, and her armies had advanced as far west as the city of Ancyra in the province of Galatea. The Pontic Alps mountain chain that runs across Asia Minor provided an obvious barrier to any further easy progress. Aurelian could scarcely seek to recover the eastern part of the empire from the trained and battle-hardened Romano-Palmyrene forces without a massive show of strength, and it is certain that he must have weakened the Danube garrisons to do so. Hence the need to evacuate the old and troublesome Roman province of Dacia. By the time spring arrived, he had formulated his course of action. There would be a two-pronged attack on the Palmyrene Empire, with Aurelian's main force pushing through Asia Minor into Syria, and a fleet under general M. Aurelius Probus to reconquer Egypt, restore control of the corn supply to Rome and divert the Palmyrene forces. This Probus was not the old admiral Tenagino Probus, who had lost his life defending Egypt against the Palmyrenes.

Just as the emperor Claudius had been fortunate to have the future soldier-emperor Aurelian as his right-hand man, so Aurelian was equally endowed with the future soldier-emperor Probus, who was, like Claudius and Aurelian, another of the line of talented Danubian generals. It is probable that Probus and his fleet sailed from the naval base of Byzantium at the head of the Aegean Sea in April 272, as we know from papyri that the Romans landed in Egypt in May.²

Naturally both sides consulted the omens and, remarkably, some of them have come down to us, through the historian Zosimus. Aurelian must have been encouraged by the Temple of Apollo at Seleucia in Cilicia: 'One hawk many doves commands, whose end on his destructive pounces must depend.' Hmm.

The Palmyrenes were less fortunate at the same temple, when they asked whether they would control the entire east: 'Accursed race! avoid my sanctuary you whose treacherous deeds the angry gods

disdain.' The shrine to Aphrodite Aphacitis was also unpromising for Zenobia. There was a pool of water there into which the supplicant could throw gifts of gold, silver or precious cloth. If the gifts sank, they were acceptable to the goddess. But if they floated ... Palmyra's last offerings floated. Perhaps they should have proffered gold.

The Palmyrenes had left only a small garrison to hold the important province of Egypt. Probus and his fleet arrived in the late spring and by mid-June 272 the key city of Alexandria had fallen into Roman hands. The remainder of the country had been rolled up by the end of the same month and, according to inscriptions, the existing Roman governor Statilius Ammianus was retained in place.

Meanwhile, Aurelian's Roman armies crossed the Bosphorus from the mint town of Byzantium into the province of Bithynia. Zenobia's troops simply melted away before Aurelian and his fearsome reputation. In any case, it appears that the towns of the former Roman provinces had less enthusiasm for the eastern rulers, and Aurelian and his army were given a rapturous welcome by the provincials wherever they appeared. The province of Bithynia had remained loyal, while the neighbouring Galatea collapsed almost at once. The key town of Ancyra was retaken immediately.

The city of Tyana in the province of Cappadocia controlled the key pass, the Cilician Gates, over the Taurus Mountains into the plains of Cilicia. Its only previous claim to fame had been that it was the birthplace of 'Apollonius of Tyana', a philosopher, or perhaps fanatic, who had been nearly contemporary with Christ. Tyana put up a brief resistance that infuriated the short-tempered Aurelian. He swore that he would not leave a dog alive in the city when he had finished with it. The traitor Heraclammon offered to show the Roman troops the way over the walls where a huge pile of earth rose up to the top like a siege mound. The tale goes that Aurelian himself ascended the mound – apparently the townspeople were too naive to watch it – and waved his purple cloak as a sign to those both inside and outside the city that it had fallen. The story beggars belief but, by whatever means, the defence was circumvented and the emperor's troops seized the city. They must have looked forward to the traditional reward for taking a defended town, namely the opportunity to plunder it, but remarkably Aurelian ordered them only to kill all the dogs in fulfilment of his promise. The story is contained in the unreliable Augustan Histories and also in the surviving fragments of the much more dependable 'Continuator of Dio', and thus did the emperor deflect his soldiers'

rage into laughter.³ He must have had confidence in his authority, for he was taking a chance. Other generals of the third century, and even the Gallic emperor Postumus, had been killed by their own troops when the latter were not permitted to loot a captured city. Then Aurelian explained to the assembled army: 'We are fighting to free the cities and, if we prefer to pillage them, they will have no more faith in us. Let us rather seek plunder from the barbarians and we shall spare those whom we regard as our own.'

The career of traitor was not an appealing one in ancient times. Quite apart from the lack of opportunities to display your talent, most contemporary peoples, including the Romans, Greeks, barbarians and Persians, regarded those who betrayed their own side with such contempt that the usual reward – whatever might have been promised – was to put the traitor to death as soon as he, or she, had served their purpose. An alternative was to hand the miscreant back to his own side for proper treatment. Given these inducements, it is surprising indeed that any felt inclined to betray their own people. The moral was written for all to see by any who cared to read Livy's famous history of early Rome.⁴

Yet there never seemed to be a shortage of applicants for the post of 'next traitor', who could be relied upon to guide an invading force through a disused well, or up a stairway that was not guarded. The ancient peoples, as defenders of a besieged city, never seemed to block up or guard all its entrances, a puzzling omission that would result in the loss of many apparently impregnable cities over the centuries. Again, there is abundant evidence from early history that the besiegers rarely tied their noose at all tightly; it always seemed to be possible for small parties to get in and out, presumably under cover of darkness.

Aurelian killed the traitor who had let his soldiers into Tyana, with the explanation: 'He who has not spared his Fatherland could not have kept faith with me.' The action clearly met with the approval of his biographer in the Augustan Histories. The benefit of rewarding treachery, so that it might encourage the next renegade to aid the imperial authority, had yet to be recognized. However, the emperor commanded that the traitor's property should be restored to his children, so that no one could accuse Aurelian of killing merely to steal. This merciful example towards Tyana heartened all the other cities of the region to open their gates to Aurelian, and probably encouraged the surrender of Egypt to Probus (mentioned above)

without resistance. Aurelian advanced to Syria.

Zenobia, then, had given up virtually all her western possessions without a fight. It was only after the siege and capture of Tyana that the Palmyrenes seem to have reacted. Feeling, no doubt, that now they had little to lose, they burned all their boats with a show of complete independence. Egyptian papyri still show Aurelian as joint ruler with Vaballathus up to 17 April, but then coins and inscriptions mark the change.

Coins issued from the mint at Alexandria no longer recognize Aurelian as emperor; only Vaballathus as *Augustus*. Other Alexandrian coins show Zenobia titled as *Augusta*, with the goddess of the moon on the reverse side. Aurelian's portrait was also dropped from coins issued at Antioch in spring/summer 272, where Vaballathus becomes *Augustus*. Zenobia is described as *Augusta* on one inscription, where the name of her co-emperor (presumed to be Aurelian) has been erased. In the province of Arabia, now held by the Palmyrenes, Vaballathus is credited with a series of victory titles, possibly earned by a defence of the eastern frontier: *Persicus Maximus*, *Adiabenicus Maximus* and *Arabicus Maximus*. The die had been cast; the 'King of Kings' had now declared himself openly as the lawful Roman emperor, in direct opposition to Aurelian.

It was already the Palmyrene custom to align their administrative titles with Roman usage. The Palmyrene Empire commanded many former Roman troops, and it is likely that they would have been of doubtful loyalty had they been asked to choose between Rome and Palmyra; hence the royal family's current selection of the Roman titles *Augustus* and *Augusta*, by which they could represent themselves as the legitimate Roman emperors.

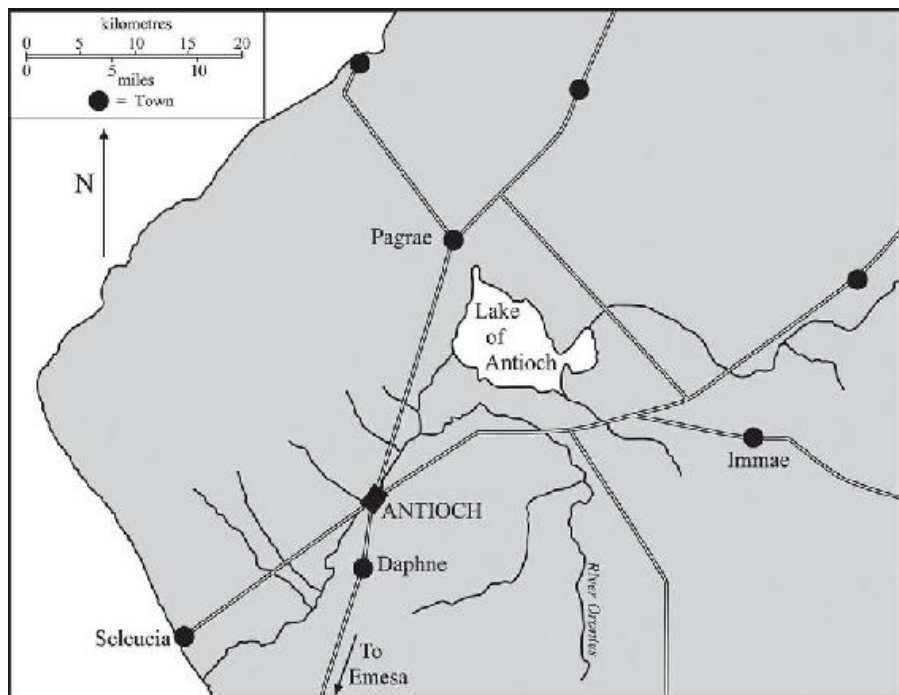
If the concept of a Palmyrene Empire was to have any meaning, Zenobia had to hold Syria. Antioch, the huge principal city of that province, was nearly as large as Alexandria and Carthage, with a population estimated as several hundred thousand at its peak. The city was the key to control of the whole Roman east and it was here that 'Christians' had first been so named in AD 41. Therefore Immae, in the plain east of Antioch, was the site of the first set-piece battle (May/June 272). The Palmyrene forces comprised light archers and heavy armoured cavalry, copied from the Persians, who were the highly experienced elite of their army. Aurelian could not match the last – he had only light cavalrymen and the heavily armoured foot soldiers of the legions – so he defeated them by a remarkable stratagem. We

follow now Downey's reconstruction of events in 1950 (see diagram on [page 95](#)).⁵ Zenobia's army had been drawn up on the Orontes plain, west of the lake of Antioch and to the north of the city. This barred Aurelian's direct route to Antioch, and provided ideal terrain for the use of the Palmyrene heavy cavalry. Aurelian therefore bypassed the plain by following the Roman road on the other side of the lake, and then planned to attack Zenobia's forces from the east, cutting off their retreat south to Antioch. Zenobia's general Zabdas understood the threat and sent cavalry along the Orontes River/main Roman road east from Antioch to intercept the Roman legions in the plain east of the Lake of Antioch. Aurelian must have sheltered his infantry by placing them north of the tributary that runs from the east into the lake.

Returning to Zosimus, the Roman light cavalry were told to continue to challenge and evade the enemy horsemen while the latter were still fresh. The Palmyrene cavalry were burdened by the weight of their armour – on horse and man – in the blistering heat of the summer day. The Roman light forces manoeuvred at speed around their opponents, retiring before sudden Palmyrene advances. After an hour or two of this, both sides had retired as far east as the small village of Immae and the Palmyrene cavalry were so utterly exhausted that they could scarcely move. At this point the Roman horsemen charged in and knocked off those of their adversaries who had not already fallen from their staggering mounts. The heavily shielded Roman infantry then marched forward and massacred the helpless archers at close quarters; the archers may still have been in the Orontes plain, and now cut off from Antioch, or they may have been caught disorganized while chasing east of Antioch after their cavalry. Zabdas, Zenobia and the surviving Palmyrene forces – presumably light archers who could run faster than armoured legionaries – retired to reorganize.

Zabdas at first fell back to the walled city of Antioch but, knowing he could not expect a warm reception there, he took the precaution of dressing up one of his men as 'Aurelian', so that the townsfolk would believe that Zabdas had captured the real emperor. The defeat must have been a heavy one, for the Palmyrenes resolved to slip out again quickly rather than attempt to defend Antioch. They retired by night by the main road south to another city, Emesa. Thus it was that the surprised Aurelian, who had anticipated another battle or a siege, found himself entering Antioch to a hero's welcome. A few

Palmyrenes remained behind as a rearguard on the road south, where they occupied a hill above a small town, Daphne, from which they hoped to harass his exit from Antioch. The legionaries locked their shields together in the famous ‘tortoise’ formation and ascended the hill safely through a hail of missiles. Once at the top, their luckless adversaries found that they had no escape. They were easily routed and many fell to their deaths from rocky crags as they sought to flee.



Battles of Immae and Daphne.

Antioch was now securely in Roman hands, by mid-June 272 according to papyri. Again Aurelian showed his statesmanship. When the emperor learned that many of its citizens had fled for aiding Zenobia, he proclaimed an amnesty on the grounds that necessity rather than choice had guided their actions. This generous offer prompted many exiles to return home. Somewhat surprisingly, the Christian church at Antioch also invited the pagan Aurelian to arbitrate on one of its internal disputes.

Paul of Samosata⁶

Paul, a native of the eastern Roman town of Samosata, had been elected bishop by the local Christian community at Antioch in 260, replacing Demetrian, who had died in office. His religious views appeared to some of the local worshippers to be heretical. In the words of the early Christian historian Eusebius, Paul was a follower of

‘Artemas and his gang’, who held that Christ was merely a man on earth. A Synod was held at Antioch in 264, for which the learned and senior Bishop of Alexandria, Dionysius, was too sick to attend, and Paul ‘covered up his heresy’, as Eusebius puts it. He was permitted to continue in office. By now the Sun-worshipping Queen Zenobia seems to have become his patron, and power went to Paul’s head, resulting in a further Christian investigation.

A new Synod was held at Antioch in 268 or 269 and this time the learned Malchion managed to nail down Paul’s excuses and explanations. Paul was disqualified as bishop, excommunicated, and a letter was sent to all the provinces explaining the decision. The Synod declared that they might have been able to accept his ambition and arrogance, and the fact that he was a terrible example to the pagans; they could have swallowed his consorting with pretty young girls in his private house or that hymns in the church at Antioch could be sung only to Paul and never to God; they might overlook the fact that he used religion merely as a means of making money. Paul could be forgiven for all these disgraces, but his heresy was intolerable.

Paul was replaced as bishop at Antioch soon after by Domnus, the son of Demetrian and the sixteenth Bishop of Antioch, according to Jerome. Yet Paul refused to vacate the church building, and was supported in his defiance by Zenobia. It was only after Aurelian and his army had entered Antioch that the local Christian community was able to appeal to its emperor. They begged the emperor to remove the heretic, to which Aurelian replied sagely: ‘The building [i.e. church] is to be given to those to whom the bishops of Italy and of the city of Rome should adjudge it.’⁷ As the otherwise hostile Eusebius would later remark, this was a perfectly just solution. Only now did Paul abandon the building.

Resumption of war with Palmyra

The battle of Immae, east of Antioch, had been the decisive moment of the entire campaign, and had demonstrated conclusively the discipline of the legions and the superior tactics of their supreme commander. Nevertheless, the war was not yet finished. The Palmyrene forces were now based at Emesa (modern Homs). Emesa was a walled Roman colony founded by the emperor Caracalla and possessing a dominant Temple of the Sun, in which its most famous former citizen, the Sun-worshipping emperor Elagabalus (218–222), had once been a priest. Elagabalus had even taken the embodiment of ‘Elagaba’, the local Sun-god in the form of a symbolic black, conical stone, to Rome with him.

The legendary stone had been returned to Emesa after the murder of the emperor. The city's inhabitants would certainly be favourable to the Roman cause.

There was now a delay, probably while Aurelian rested his troops and ensured that Egypt was secure; fertile Egypt would have to serve as his principal supply base. Reinforcements for the Roman army poured in from the liberated cities. Thus strengthened, and with Zenobia's forces correspondingly weakened, Aurelian marched south to Emesa, picking up without a fight many minor towns along the way. It is likely that the Palmyrenes had been forced to denude the entire area of troops, in order to strengthen their main force and to provide a secondary army to block the direct route from Antioch to Palmyra.

In the plain outside Emesa, Zenobia and Zabdas were able to put up a force of 70,000 Palmyrenes and their allies. Against them, Aurelian drew up the forces of an empire: Dalmatian cavalry, crack legions from the Illyricum area, his Imperial Brigade, Moorish cavalry, newly recruited soldiers from the recovered provinces of Asia and Syria and, strangest of all, wild club-men recruited from Palestine. Even so, his forces were numerically inferior.

After battle had been joined, the Roman cavalry gave ground a little so that their advancing infantry could not be encircled by the large numbers of armoured horsemen of the Palmyrenes hovering on the perimeter. The latter chased the retiring cavalry and thus disrupted their own troop lines; probably the foot soldiers followed too quickly. At this critical juncture, the Romans claimed to have seen a 'divine form' giving them encouragement. The Roman infantry promptly smashed in and routed Zenobia's forces. In the confusion, the club-men turned their weapons onto the armour of the enemy cavalrymen, so terrifying them that they fled in disorder back into the city. The result was an overwhelming victory for the Romans.

Zenobia, Zabdas and, no doubt, Zabbai (the second-in-command, known only from an inscription at Palmyra) considered a continuation of the fight from Emesa itself, but took the advice of other councillors: that Emesa would not welcome them, Egypt had already fallen to another Roman army that might take them from the rear, while a flight to Palmyra would give them time to reconsider their options properly. This was the advice they followed, so that Aurelian was able to enter Emesa in person to a rapturous welcome from its inhabitants. He made his way into the Temple of Elagabalus to pay his vows and,

legend has it, saw the same entity (the famous black stone? the Sun-god?) who had so heartened his troops in the battle and to whom he would build a local temple. So precipitous had been the flight of the Palmyrenes back to their own citadel that the Romans were able to seize huge quantities of their possessions and resources that had been abandoned.

Now Aurelian could attack Zenobia's base, her colossal city of Palmyra (summer 272). There was no question of a quick march across the intervening desert, although the total distance from Emesa was an accessible 100 miles (160 kilometres) or so. An entire supply chain would be needed to support the army across the arid land, and then to maintain them for the length of time required to besiege Palmyra, and again to get the army home. It would be safe to assume that the Palmyrenes would have poisoned or buried every well and chopped down every source of sustenance (such as palm trees with their dates) in the area. The attitude of the local desert dwellers would also need to be assessed, since (if friendly) use of their camels would be hugely preferable to the habitual use of the Roman army's mules and oxen, while unfriendly tribesmen could make life very difficult with hit-and-run attacks on the slow-moving supply convoys.

One might suppose that the local Bedouin (usually called 'Saracens' in the ancient literature) would have been predisposed to favour Zenobia, since passage of the caravans from the river Euphrates via Palmyra benefited all the locals. The tolls levied by Palmyra probably contained an element of 'protection money', paid to the local Bedouin to deter them from attacking the caravans in the open desert.

However, the Arabic tradition^{8, 9} indicates that Zenobia (named as 'Zebba') was unpopular with the Tanukh, an Arab people who had deserted Artaxerxes when he became ruler of Persia. They emerge in history as a people on the fringes of the deserts of Arabia. Allegedly Jadhima (attested by inscriptions as king of the Tanukh) had killed 'Arur in a struggle for control of the river Euphrates. 'Arur's daughter was Zenobia, of the same tribe as Odaenathus. Zenobia thus desired to take vengeance on Jadhima and to conquer the Tanukh. She proposed a marriage pact to link both sides, then treacherously seized and killed the king.

It seems that the Tanukh, under Jadhima's nephew, supported Aurelian in his march to Palmyra. Other nomadic tribes appear to have taken the side of Zenobia, judging by some ambiguous inscriptions.

The Arab tradition is essentially in accord with the Latin and Greek authors. Friendly tribesmen assisted with the movement of his entire army across the 80 to 90 miles (130 to 145 kilometres) of desert between Syria and Palmyra – other Arabs hindered them – and they supplied the Roman army with provisions. The Romans had been forced to cross the desert in the middle of the summer.

The city itself was hugely stocked with supplies, armaments and catapults that could hurl burning pitch. At first Aurelian tried negotiations. He sent a letter to Zenobia saying: ‘You should have done voluntarily what is now commanded with my letters. I order you to surrender.’ He went on to say that, if she did, the lives and rights of the citizens would be respected. The only penalty would be that Zenobia would have to hand over all her personal wealth, a marvellous array of jewels, gold, silver, silks, horses and camels; her life and the lives of her children would be spared.¹⁰ Evidently the emperor felt that the troops would demand some recompense in the form of booty for all that they had endured.

Zenobia replied, in an insolent letter written in Greek: ‘It is not I more greatly affected with losses. For those who died in battle were mostly Romans.’ (This may have been a reference to the part-contested passage across the desert.) She added that she had no intention of surrendering to a letter and that the descendant of Cleopatra would rather die as a queen than live as a commoner. Besides, reinforcements were expected from Persia; surely bluff after the rough treatment handed out earlier by Palmyra to Shapur. The reply outraged the short-fused Aurelian, who now set in hand preparations for a full siege supervised by himself. Plans were made to intercept any new arrivals from Persia. At one point, he appears to have received a minor arrow wound when he strayed too close to the city.

The ancient literature insists that Palmyra was protected by massive walls and that the Romans were forced to institute a full siege. Such walls would certainly have been those that witnesses of the fourth century (when the surviving histories were written) would have seen. It was Gawlikowski,¹¹ with a series of papers concerning Palmyra in the 1970s and 1980s, who undermined this idea completely. The huge walls (now in ruins), which would have been observed in the fourth century and subsequently, were those erected by the emperor Diocletian in about 300 as a defence against the resurgent Persians. The original walls are scarcely visible today, but

archaeology shows that they surrounded a much larger area than the Diocletian walls, whilst being far weaker. These walls are estimated to have been only 2.6 yards (2.4 metres) wide, just 5.5 yards (5 metres) tall, and with only a handful of watch towers; they were intended only to provide protection against sudden barbarian raids. Furthermore, no definite trace of the characteristic Roman siege circumvalidation (a defensive rampart built all around a besieged city) around Palmyra has ever been found!

In fact, it would have been a major operation to have brought siege engines and the like across a desert, and it seems that Aurelian contented himself with a distant ring of troops safely out of arrow range to cut off all supplies coming into Palmyra. The city was provided with its own spring, so there was little chance of it running out of water.

This remote siege was a protracted affair in the blistering desert heat, for so well-stocked a city with walls sufficient to prevent a sudden incursion could not readily be taken by storm. The delay appears to have caused criticism at Rome, for Aurelian felt obliged to announce:

The Romans say I have only to bear a war against a woman, yet her forces are as great as a man's. And what manner of woman! How wise in debates, how agreeable in disposition, how grave towards military matters, how bountiful, when the need may arise, how severe, when strictness requires. The peoples of the East and Egypt so feared her that neither Arabs, nor Saracens, nor Armenians, would wage war with her.

For a while the citizens of Palmyra were able to defy the besieging Roman army from their walled city, during which they hoped that the attackers would run out of supplies and have to retire. When it became clear that this would not happen, disputes arose within the city as to the best course of action, some advocating surrender trusting to Aurelian's reputation for mercy; others wanting to seek aid from the Persian Empire. However, Shapur had died at about this time, and the Persians were distracted by disputes about the succession. Aurelian was able to suborn some of the Saracen and Armenian reinforcements to change sides and even employed some Persians as archers.

While these disputes were in progress, one of the city defenders made a habit of cat-calling at Aurelian from high up on the city walls, whenever the emperor came forward to review progress. One of his gifted marksmen told his superior: 'Sir, I could get him!' The archer

fitted an arrow to his bow, shielded by other soldiers in front, drew a bead on the critic and let fly. The cat-caller fell dead from the battlements.

Eventually supplies within Palmyra became low and Zenobia herself mounted one of the swiftest dromedaries and fled eastwards in search of assistance. Again, the exits had not been well stopped by the besieging force; indeed, in this instance, their main preoccupation may have been with keeping intruders out from the city. The Roman light cavalry chased after Zenobia in hot pursuit and actually caught up with her just as she ran into a boat waiting on the river Euphrates. The soldiers dragged her off the boat and brought her back to an agreeably surprised Aurelian. Later, Zosimus tells us, he had second thoughts, reckoning that posterity would give him little credit for having conquered a mere woman.

After this setback, there remained for a while dissent within the city about whether or not to surrender. But finally Palmyra yielded to assurances from the emperor (c. August 272), and Zosimus gives an account of the fearful citizens emerging from the city gates with gifts and sacrifices for their conquerors. Yet Aurelian again showed clemency. He accepted the sacrifices and returned the gifts, although he did require payment of a large tribute. The people of Palmyra were allowed to return home to their city, and a Roman garrison was put in charge there. Palmyra was now to be ruled by Marcellinus, the Roman governor of the Euphrates border. A certain Sandario was appointed local commander at Palmyra of the garrison of 600 bowmen. It is also possible that the Roman army made a show of force against Persia before departure from Palmyra (see below). Zenobia, her young son Vaballathus, through whom she ruled, and her board of counsellors were taken as captives, and Aurelian and his army returned to Antioch, or perhaps Emesa, where a treason trial was held of the captives.

Zenobia claimed that she was just a poor, weak woman who had been led astray by her advisors and her life was spared, despite loud demands for her death from the army. In contrast, the principal advisers were all executed. Prominent among them was the Greek counsellor and philosopher Longinus, whose loss was later regretted by Aurelian's biographers. There remains extant a letter from Libanius, a pagan orator of the fourth century, asking for a promised copy from one Eusebius of one of Odaenathus' speeches, drafted by Longinus. Little of Longinus' copious writings have survived to the

current day.

The emperor may also have had two of Zenobia's three sons killed at this time, an event proposed tentatively by the Augustan Histories but unlikely as her third son, Vaballathus, survived to be appointed the client king of Armenia; some of his medals still survive. The other two had probably died before the war with Aurelian. General Zabdas disappears from history at this time, and was presumably also among those executed.

Aurelian still seemed to be concerned with his reputation concerning the fact that he had overcome 'only' a woman. The Augustan Histories and other writers remark the admiration of the emperor for Zenobia, and he is quoted as saying that he spared her life in view of her previous services with Odaenathus for Rome against Persia. He was also determined to parade the fallen queen: in the east so that all might know of her downfall (Malalas claims that Zenobia was exhibited in chains for three days at Antioch) and, especially, at Rome. In the meantime, Aurelian took the designations of *Parthicus Maximus* and *Palmyrenicus Maximus*, apparently interchangeable titles that described the downfall of Palmyra, while a coin shows the legend *Victoria Parthica* – the Palmyrene Empire was still mis-named as that of Parthia. The rhetorician Callinicus, who had previously dedicated a history to Zenobia as 'Cleopatra', would now write a book entitled *On the Restoration*, assumed to be that of Aurelian.¹²

The eastern legions

What happened to them? The arid air and the lower population density of the Middle East has resulted in the preservation of papyri, inscriptions and monuments better than anywhere else in the Roman world. Yet none of these primary sources, nor the classical literature, informs us that the eastern legions were ever directly involved in the events unfolding before their eyes between Aurelian and Palmyra. Nor does this issue appear much to have troubled modern writers on the subject.

Palmyra supposedly had under its sway no fewer than eleven Roman legions, and probably about an equal manpower in various auxiliary legions. Of these eleven, VI Ferrata disappeared from history after 250, and is thought to have been destroyed by Shapur at Edessa in Cappadocia when he captured the emperor Valerian in about 260. The legions of Egypt (presumably II Traiana) and Arabia (III Cyrenaica) had been roughly handled by Palmyrene forces during their first expansionary phase, and perhaps had not yet been rebuilt.

Yet no fewer than four legions should have been stationed in or around Syria at this time, with another two in Cappadocia and a further two in Mesopotamia. Saunders¹³ suggests that the three-way fighting by these legions under usurpers against Gallienus in about 260, and then the suppression of the same usurpers by Odaenathus, must have greatly reduced their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the names, at any rate, of every one of these eleven legions, excepting VI Ferrata, is known to have survived in legionary form to 300 and beyond, after which most were included in the complete list of military forces known as the *Notitia Dignitatum* (c. 400).

Much more likely, to this author, is that the Palmyrenes, uncertain of the Roman legions' loyalties, deployed those under their command as remote frontier troops, to guard against the Persians and the threats of less-civilized tribal enemies such as the Bedouin and Blemmyes. The soldiers of these legions were probably bystanders during the war between Aurelian and the Palmyrenes, although it is clear from the ancient sources that Aurelian was able to use some of these troops actively after his first convincing victory outside Antioch.

Persia, more barbarians, Palmyra revisited and an Egyptian revolt

The eastern Palmyrene Empire had been recovered for Rome with surprisingly little bloodshed – at any rate among the Roman forces – and it seems likely that Aurelian tarried awhile in the east, where he made a successful, punitive sortie into Persia presumably in response to aid they had provided to Zenobia. Only two of our ancient sources mention the campaign against Persia: Aurelius Victor and the Augustan Histories. He seized some of the 'dragon flags' used as standards by the Persians; the metal head had an open fang through which air passed into a long silken streamer, creating a hissing sound. An alternative possibility is that Aurelian used his imposing and victorious army to conduct negotiations from a position of strength with Hormizd, the new king of Persia and a son of Shapur. Independent confirmation of Aurelian's successes in Persia comes from the victory title that Aurelian adopted, *Persicus Maximus*, found on a coin (the same title found in inscriptions appears always to be used as a substitute for *Parthicus Maximus*).

There must also have been some reorganization in the east. Malalas claims that Aurelian sent troops to retake the province of Arabia when occupied by relatives of 'Enathos' (presumed to be Odaenathus), and a single inscription is known that claims Aurelian as *Arabicus Max*. This is thought to have been a simple error, when *Parthicus Max*. was

intended, and it is unlikely that Aurelian would really have split his force when attacking Palmyra. Statilius Ammianus had been the governor of Egypt from 271 to at least August 272, from the evidence of papyri. Probably it was at this time that he was replaced with Claudius Firmus, who is thought to have been the same as the Egyptian prefect of 264/5 and therefore a safe pair of hands.¹⁴

The ancient literature attests to the fact that Aurelian created two new legions, allegedly after he had conquered Palmyra. It is not clear why, since he had recovered all the legions of the east. If they were undermanned, for whatever reason, then why not simply build them up to full strength? Or was he still worried about Persia, despite his victory claim of *Persicus Maximus*?

It seems to be widely assumed that Legio I Illyricorum was created by Aurelian,¹⁵ and the name suggests that it was originally recruited in the Balkans. Thus it was probably raised while Aurelian was preparing to attack the Palmyrene Empire. It is likely that the legion would have been manned by troops transferred from the other Balkan legions, since training of raw recruits must have required several months, and they could hardly have been trained on the march. Instead, the other depleted Balkan legions would have recruited replacements for local use. After Palmyra had been overthrown, this legion was stationed in its own military base nearby, as a non-eastern guard that would be unlikely to be drawn into local politics. The same legion was still based at Palmyra in 400.

Legio IV Martia¹⁶ is often thought to have been created by Aurelian, and certainly existed before Diocletian's refortification of the eastern frontier, since the main legionary base at Betthorus (modern Lejjun; Arabic spelling of '*legio(n)*') in the Roman province of Arabia has been dated to about 300. However, excavations have demonstrated that the legionary base could accommodate, as an absolute maximum, only 1,500 troops, and therefore it could not have housed a full legion of Aurelian's time. This alone, coupled with the fort's typical late Roman layout, makes it probable that Legio IV Martia was really created during the rule of Diocletian (probably post-293), consistent with the fact that no coins have been found at its main base that predate Diocletian. Again, this legion survived at least until 400. In this context, we must note that the legionary base of Legio I Illyricorum at Palmyra is of similar size to that of Betthorus,¹⁷ and therefore presumably is also of the age of Diocletian. This author can find no inscriptions for either legion that can be dated firmly to

the pre-Diocletian era. Thus there is no very strong evidence that either legion existed during Aurelian's time.

And, finally, Legio III Augusta based at Lambaesis in the province of Numidia, northern Africa, was definitely renamed to Legio III Augusta Aureliana,¹⁸ implying that it had been reorganized. Its prefect during Aurelian's time was Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus, but the legion would be relisted in the *Notitia Dignitatum* under its original name.

Aurelian's huge achievement had been to reunite the eastern part of the empire, and its grain, wealth and tax potential, with the central authority of Rome herself. The Roman army had also become significantly enlarged by the addition of the eastern legions, while at the same time the threats to Rome from the east had been greatly reduced. For all this, the grateful Senate bestowed upon Aurelian the important title of *Restitutor Orientis* (Restorer of the East), an appellation that appears on many coins. That was a mighty enough achievement for any emperor, but Aurelian must have felt that now he had a tidy force with which he could really start to put right all the disasters that had befallen the empire.

The energetic emperor and his tireless army marched back from Syria to the lower Danube area, where another invasion of barbarians, this time the Carpi, had been timed to take advantage of the reduced garrisons there. The Carpi were a tribe centred in northern Dacia that had stirred up trouble previously under the emperors Gordian III and Philip between c. 240–250, and had also made attacks during the reign of Gallienus, who had probably abandoned the northern half of Dacia to them. During the crossing of the Bosphorus, separating Europe from Asia, one or more of Aurelian's ships sank, including one that carried several important captives from Palmyra. Zenobia herself survived.

The time needed to move the army from Syria to Byzantium must have been of the order of seventy days, therefore the Balkans could not have been reached before late November 272. Although it was by now late autumn, the Romans conducted a vigorous campaign against the Carpi, who were destroyed perhaps in about January 273. It may well have been at this time that Aurelian decided to abandon the southern half of Dacia, although surely the evacuation would not have occurred during winter, instead of doing so when he was heading east to overthrow Zenobia (see [chapter 5](#)). The emperor also settled many captured barbarians south of the Danube – not quite unprecedented but probably the first on such a scale, and indicative of the

contemporary shortage of manpower available to the Romans in this critical area. The Senate, in Aurelian's absence, enthusiastically added the title *Carpicus* to his already prestigious list. When he heard of this, Aurelian is said to have joked: 'It remains only for you to call me "*Carpisculus*" [a form of boot]'. He may have felt that his other titles had been devalued by a reward for a border skirmish, although the affair was certainly sufficiently serious to merit recognition by several of the ancient historians.

Word came through to Aurelian from the Roman governor of the Euphrates border, Marcellinus, that the Palmyrene aristocracy had taken advantage of the emperor's absence to create a riot, culminating in the massacre of his garrison at Palmyra. The rebels, via a certain Apsaeus (possibly the Septimius Apsaeus known from an inscription at Palmyra), had tried to persuade Marcellinus to join the revolt, but he fobbed them off with ambiguous answers while awaiting the return of his master. One 'Septimius Antiochus' was appointed by the Palmyrenes as their new emperor; he assumed the purple toga in late 272/early 273. An inscription at Palmyra claims that Antiochus was a son of Zenobia, in which case the latter must have remarried after the death of Odaenathus and Antiochus would have to be fewer than five years old. At once, Aurelian, who was then near the Rhodope mountains west of Byzantium in Thrace, turned about with his armies and retraced his steps to Palmyra. Stern and grim, he arrived at the city of Antioch without warning (spring 273), in the middle of a horse race, terrifying the local population, and then moved on. Palmyra was unprepared for such a speedy return and fell into his hands almost at once.

Again, marching times give an idea of when Aurelian's army reached Palmyra.¹⁹ Since he could hardly have left Europe before the end of January, and the distance from Byzantium directly to Palmyra is about 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometres), or fifty days at a hastened 20 miles (32 kilometres) per day, the army could not have reached Palmyra before mid-March at earliest. If the army was quartered further west in the Balkans than Byzantium, which seems probable (Aurelian must have hoped that he would be able to conquer the Gallic Empire shortly after, so the troops needed to be westwards), then perhaps another month would be needed for the return to Palmyra. Moreover, it is unclear when Marcellinus' letter to Aurelian arrived; it had to travel by urgent messenger some 1,200 miles (1,900 kilometres), taking about a fortnight.

It is even likely that there was little popular support for the uprising, as an inscription in Palmyra, dated to March 273/4, shows that the chief priest of the god Bel gave support to the emperor's designs.²⁰ Whether the actions of the chief priest apply to the earlier or the current attack on Palmyra depend rather critically on when a warning letter was posted by Marcellinus and how close Aurelian's main army was to Byzantium. Aurelian might, perhaps, simply have used cavalry for the return to Antioch, and picked up vexillations of infantry stationed in anticipation near Antioch from the main legions in the area. Again, no usurper at Palmyra is known to have issued any coinage, so the rebellion must have been crushed very quickly. It seems that Aurelian really did reach Palmyra for a second time by March 273.

This time, there was to be no mercy. The legions annihilated those inhabitants who resisted, plundered all the valuables and razed the fortifications of the giant city to the ground. Later, Aurelian would give orders that its Temple of Bel should be rebuilt; modern archaeology suggests that neither it nor the remainder of the city had been much damaged, but probably all the fittings had been looted. A handful of survivors were permitted to return, but Palmyra never fully recovered. Those of the Arab inhabitants who survived resumed their nomadic life. Even the trade route that Palmyra once dominated was moved farther north, to the town of Batnae. One problem for the Romans was that, once the old caravan cities such as Palmyra, Edessa and Petra had been annexed, they were no longer useful as buffer states. This required that the cities themselves be better fortified, and the local itinerant tribes would be used by both Rome and Persia for control of the intervening desert.

The emperor Diocletian (284–305) would partially rebuild Palmyra, adding military buildings, a new, stronger, surrounding wall, baths and an imperial palace. The city would recover further under the rule of the Byzantine Empire (although Procopius claims it was almost deserted when the Byzantine troops first arrived), at which time it was further refortified to protect the local road. The city was seized in 634 during the mass Arab invasions of the Byzantine Empire, but received additional improvement under the Umayyads. It was finally abandoned by the Islamic Abbasid dynasty, which preferred to rule from Baghdad, and was sacked by Tamerlane, a murderous Mongol conqueror of the fourteenth century. When the ruins of the city were visited by Wood and Dawkins in 1751, they were said to

contain the most magnificent remains of classical antiquity, although only some thirty to forty families still resided there. Even today, the ruins remain a sombre spectacle surrounded by arid desert and overlooked by an Arab castle built in medieval times, presumably from the rubble of the city, and perched on an equally desolate hill. The town of Tadmur (Tadmor), not to be equated with Solomon's 'Tadmur-in-the-Wilderness', resides nearby. The Temple of Bel provides the best-preserved ruins, and was for generations a home to Bedouin tribes, until evicted by the French colonial authorities in the 1920s. The ancient oasis still exists.

The usurper Antiochus had been spared because, according to Aurelian, he was too mean a person to merit punishment. Antiochus was probably only a toddler anyway. A worthier opponent may have presented himself in the shape of a wealthy Greek paper merchant, 'Firmus', who had had the temerity to foment a revolt in Egypt (273), probably in conjunction with the uprising in Palmyra. 'Firmus' had a reputation as a big drinker, one who had liked in happier times to compete with Aurelian's generals. It is very likely that the author of the Augustan Histories has confused this Firmus with the official governor of Egypt at the time, the *corrector* Claudius Firmus known from papyri and an inscription. It is quite certain that the *corrector* was not the rebel, for he was still in office long after the rebellion had been quashed.

Alexandria, once a small fishing village, had been made the capital of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. By the third century, it was one of the greatest cities of the Roman world, with a population of some 200,000–300,000, and renowned for its monuments – and its riots. The lighthouse 'Pharos of Alexandria' was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and its Great Library had been founded by Ptolemy I Soter. The city also housed the tomb of Alexander himself, known to have been near the centre, but the site is now lost after the egocentric Roman emperor Caracalla ordered it to be blocked up after he had visited it.

'Firmus', allegedly, managed to put up an ill-disciplined rabble who sacked Alexandria prior to their leader's assumption of the purple. Ammianus Marcellinus²¹ records that Alexandria, frequently in turmoil, had been so divided that eventually civil strife broke out, resulting in the destruction of the walls and the district called Bruchion (containing the royal palace and one quarter of the city). The fabulous 500-year-old Alexandrian library, located in the palace

grounds and filled with predominantly Greek-language books, was also destroyed. This loss, together with that of the neighbouring museum, must be accounted a major blow to civilization, and occurred during the summer of 273 – late June at the earliest. Then ‘Firmus’ began to mint coins (if true, none is known to us today) and raise a proper army. Again, Rome’s corn supply was threatened.

The rebellion was not a good idea with the real emperor so close. Aurelian immediately hastened round from Syria and crushed the ragged forces put into the field against him. ‘Firmus’, described by the emperor as a ‘brigand’, was seized and tortured to death. Again, marching times can be used to require suppression of the revolt no earlier than mid-July. The production of coins from the mint at Alexandria, which had just hit a new low, suddenly increased greatly at about the same time (Aurelian’s ‘third year’ of rule). A papyrus of this period²² records at some length the minutes of the Oxyrhynchus council, including the issue of a crown for Aurelian. Local councils were expected to offer gold crowns to an emperor who had claimed a formal victory, and they became such a useful source of government revenue that the emperor Caracalla is reported to have invented fictitious ‘victories’. The Oxyrhynchus crown commemorates presumably the conquest just described, and the papyrus is dated to September 272/3. Apparently, a government collector had turned up, the crown was ready, but the gold workers demanded more money. A further twelve talents were to be handed over.

It seems that Aurelian left property rights as he found them in Palmyra and Alexandria after his departure.²³ Some twenty years later, the emperor Diocletian would order the restoration of free status to a man enslaved under Palmyrene rule, while a papyrus deals with a similar issue at Alexandria.

The nomadic Blemmyes tribe had been a constant nuisance to the southern frontier of Egypt, mentioned even by Pliny the Elder. By the middle of the third century, the important quarry ‘Mons Claudianus’, which dealt in marble and porphyry, had been abandoned although it was not exhausted.²⁴ In fact, this quarry is still mined today. It is thought that the quarry was abandoned owing to the insecurity caused by the Blemmyes, notwithstanding the fact that it was guarded by its own fort, although shortage of water is another explanation. It is therefore quite possible that, as suggested by the unreliable Augustan Histories, Aurelian now formed a friendly relationship with the king of Axomis (modern Axum), a town in Ethiopia, who claimed to control

them. Axum is not easy to find in a modern atlas, but lies at about 13oN 38oE on a tributary of the Nile between Khartoum and the Red Sea, more than 1,250 miles (2,000 kilometres) to the south of Alexandria. It is hardly likely that the emperor himself could have spared the time to travel so far personally.

While in Egypt, Aurelian might have heard of the celebrated hermit, St Anthony.²⁵ Anthony was an Egyptian who had been born in about 252 at a village by the middle Nile. His parents died at about the same time as the arrival of Zenobia's general Zabdas, who seized the country for his mistress. A keen student of the Bible, Anthony elected to give up his parents' farm in about the year 270, and moved to a remote mountainous area in the desert, where he became a hermit for some thirty-five years, subsisting only on bread and water. Here he attracted both pilgrims and the sick who hoped to be cured. In 305, long after the recovery of Egypt by the Romans and the death of Aurelian, Anthony moved down from the mountains to establish cells for fellow hermits. St Anthony is often described as the founder of the monasteries, but his 'monks' were required to live in strict isolation. He made one visit to Alexandria to support the local Christians in the face of persecution, before retiring again to the desert mountains, 20 miles (32 kilometres) west of the Red Sea. A second visit to Alexandria for the same purpose as the first followed some forty years later. It must have been a healthy life. He died in 357 at the age of about 105.

Now Aurelian departed with the bulk of his armies to return to Europe. He had recovered all the east from Palmyra and had chastised the Persians, but the boundaries between the Roman and Persian empires remain unclear to us today. We know that Odaenathus had driven Shapur completely out of Mesopotamia, but Aurelian would later nurture plans to expel the Persians from the same province. It is possible that the Persians had taken the opportunity while Palmyra was besieged to grab back some of Mesopotamia, and that Aurelian's expedition to Persia shortly afterwards was in response to this. Zosimus describes Marcellinus as the 'prefect of Mesopotamia' under Aurelian, which implies full control of the two legions stationed there.

Chapter Seven

Restorer of the World

Restoration of the western empire (274)¹

With peace finally settled upon the eastern part of the empire – and this time for good, at least so far as Aurelian was concerned – the emperor was able to move his large armies back through the Balkans and into northern Italy. The time had now clearly come to reunite the remnant of the breakaway Gallic–Roman Empire with the central Roman authority.

The Gallic–Roman Empire was rotting from within. Only Gaul and Britain remained of the original three countries that had defected to Postumus. Spain had returned to Aurelian's nominal rule, although cut off by Gaul. Postumus was dead and two successors had been speedily murdered. The value of the coinage had also shown a recent marked decline; the 'silver' coins contained even less silver than those of Gallienus and the gold coins, although pure, had lost one third of their weight since the death of Postumus. The dies and standard of striking of the coins were now so bad in Gaul that it became difficult to distinguish genuine coins from fakes, with the result that better quality coins from the central Roman mints were increasingly imported.² The loss of the silver mines of Spain must have been a severe blow, only partly compensated by the supply of silver, as a removable minor impurity, from the lead mines of Britain. The citizens of Gaul would have looked with envy at the sudden new prosperity of the remainder of the Roman Empire, with peace restored and markets reopened, and the influx of wealth from Palmyra.

The Gallic–Roman Empire now controlled only seven of the legions of the empire, of which three were deployed in Britain. Nevertheless, the four legions on the Rhine (I Minervia and III Ulpia Victrix in Germany Inferior; VIII Augusta and XXII Primigenia in Germany Superior) remained a formidable force – thus far deployed only towards the German barbarians, against whom they enjoyed some success in repelling invasions in 271 and 272 – and they were actively recruiting Frankish and German auxiliaries to bolster their strength. The present emperor in Gaul, Tetricus (271–274), had been plagued by internal dissent and threatened by his own army officers and, as already remarked, he seems to have had little enthusiasm for his role

in the first place. Although he had appointed his son as caesar, attested by coins for each Tetricus and rare issues for both rulers on the same coin, he had initiated a secret correspondence with Aurelian with a view to surrendering power to the official emperor. He needed to choose his moment with care. One of the supplicant's letters to Aurelian contained this line from Vergil: 'Snatch me, invincible one, from these evils.'

It was at about this time that Faustinus rebelled at the Gallic city of Augusta Treverorum (Trier) in Gaul, although the two relevant ancient writers disagree about whether the revolt was against Tetricus or, a little later, against Aurelian.³ The rebel, despite being in control of the key Gallic mint city, issued no known coins; since the same mint would be closed soon after Aurelian had taken control of Gaul (see below), a revolt against the latter becomes more plausible. If so, considering Aurelian's reputation by then, Faustinus chose an unusually elaborate manner with which to commit suicide. Whatever the circumstances, the revolt was soon suppressed.

Although the timing of Aurelian's march into Gaul has been hotly contested, a few facts can be stated baldly. Tetricus had taken his third and last consulship beginning in January 274 (known from coins), so the battle occurred after Aurelian's struggles in the Middle East. Marching times for Aurelian's army provide a simple means of ruling out other earlier dates. Saunders⁴ computes the distance by land from Alexandria to the major army base of Sirmium in the Balkans as some 2,200 miles (3,500 kilometres); thus, at 13 miles (21 kilometres) per day, Sirmium could not have been reached before late January 274. The shortest route to Belgium – where the final battle took place – was another 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometres), requiring a further seventy-seven days, for a total of about eight months. Thus the earliest date for the battle between the armies of Aurelian and the Gallic-Roman Empire is mid-April 274.

Alternatively, Aurelian and his armies might have preferred to detour and to advance into the Gallic Empire following Claudius' previous safe route west of the Alps to Cularo, and up the valley of the river Rhone to Lugdunum (Lyons), which would be unlikely to offer much resistance. This detour would add another 180 miles (290 kilometres) or so, another fortnight of marching and perhaps a fortnight to persuade Lugdunum to return to the central fold. Then the army would have moved north along the valley of the river Saone. Whichever route Aurelian took, his ultimate objective must have been

an advance along the river Marne towards the key rebel mint city of Augusta Treverorum (see map [page 26](#)).

Tetricus led out his Rhine armies for the purpose, as his biographers remarked, of maintaining appearances. Battle was joined near Catalaunum on the river Marne (Chalons-sur-Marne), about halfway between the modern cities of Paris and Nancy and thus deep within Gaul. But Tetricus and his close staff suddenly defected to join Aurelian, evidently as part of a prearranged plan as otherwise they could hardly have reached him without being set upon. Bereft of their leaders, and without any formal battle plan, Tetricus' army was speedily routed and apparently chopped to pieces.⁵ The massacre can have formed no part of Aurelian's scheme, as he still needed a strong defence of the Rhine, but he had finally reunited the western empire with Rome. The sudden end of the Gallic-Roman Empire, with its achievements and potential, certainly upset one distinguished modern admirer, who wrote of 'the reckless imperialism of Aurelian'.⁶

Why did Tetricus change sides in the middle of the battle, and not before? There has been speculation that in fact he made a real stand, and was captured during the battle, but this scarcely fits with Aurelian's subsequently amiable treatment of Tetricus. The Gallic ex-emperor's coins were allowed to continue to circulate, his name was not erased from monuments, his administrative appointments were not changed (judging by inscriptions) and later Tetricus would be given an important governorship by Aurelian. Hardly the treatment of a rebel captured in battle. The reason that Tetricus did not change sides earlier was that he wanted to undermine the resistance of the Rhine legions. An earlier defection would have resulted simply in the generals of the Gallic Empire appointing one of their number to make a proper battle. Indeed, it is worth remarking the difference between Aurelian's conduct towards the Palmyrenes and the Gallic-Roman Empire. The Palmyrenes seem to have been regarded as real enemies, to be crushed. The Gallic Romans were treated more as runaway children, who needed taking in hand again. So far as we know, the Gallic legions and their commanders were also kept in place.

Aurelian did what he could to restore the defences of the Rhine and put walls around some towns in Gaul. Gregory of Tours (sixth century) cited the belief of 'the ancients' that Aurelian had placed a wall around the city of Dijon in Gaul. The ancient town of Cenabum had been an important port on the river Loire, until attacked and burned by Julius Caesar after a Gallic insurrection there. Aurelian now rebuilt

the ruined town and added a wall, then renamed the new city as 'Aureliani', according to Gregory. The new name has survived into the modern age as Orléans, south-west of Paris. Aurelian felt it prudent to make one important administrative change: contrary to the normal habit of placing mints next to their armies, the mint at Augusta Treverorum was closed and the former mint at Lugdunum, far to the west, was reopened. Temptation had been placed out of reach of the Rhine armies, and it appears that Aurelian's loyal general Probus, the future emperor, was put in charge of this powerful force. The date of the change has been disputed, but 'it seems certain now that the move occurred late in 274.'⁷

Inscriptions in Gaul now recognize Aurelian as *Restitutor Galliarum* and, perhaps genuinely and not out of propaganda, as *Restitutor Libertatis*.⁸ A surprisingly high percentage of those surviving inscriptions dedicated to Aurelian are known from Gaul and Germany, and all are dated to 274/275. It would appear that the locals were only too happy to celebrate the restoration of the real emperor. What about Britannia (Britain)? There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that Aurelian and his armies crossed to that island, but inscriptions that now began to appear in Gaul glorifying their new emperor contain, among other titles, that of *Britannicus Maximus*, traditionally celebrating a conquest. It seems very likely that the downfall of Tetricus had persuaded Britain to rejoin the official Roman world. Britain had shown little enthusiasm for the break in the first place, but so long as the Gallic-Roman Empire remained in place, it was cut off from central rule.

The Roman Empire restored (274)

Aurelian and his hardy, well-disciplined legions had by now accomplished a feat that had no parallel in Roman history. Together they had seen off numerous bands of barbarians and reunited the entire Roman world. For this extraordinary achievement, the Senate and Roman people bestowed on Aurelian the highest honour that had ever been granted genuinely: *Restitutor Orbis* – Restorer of the World. Postumus, Valerian and Gallienus had all awarded themselves the same title without any justification. The emperor was also granted a 'Triumph', a parade in which the emperor and his victorious legions were allowed to march proudly into Rome to the cheers of the entire population. As was customary in such Triumphs, captives taken from those whom they had vanquished were led in procession before the conquerors, together with samples of the booty that had been seized.

The timing of the Triumph can only be conjectured, although it was certainly in 274. The only other definite fact, again deducible from marching times, is that the event could not have happened before the summer of that year. None of the customary coins issued to mark the occasion is known to have survived. It would probably have occurred shortly after the reunification of the empire, but others have suggested dates as late as August or September, when Aurelian would have celebrated his *quinquennalia* (beginning of fifth year of rule). In any case, it was the grandest Triumph that Rome had ever seen, or would ever see again. And, unlike the Triumph of Gallienus that had actually been earned largely by the eastern king Odaenathus, Aurelian had fully deserved his. The Augustan Histories provide a full account of the spectacle. The account may well be fictitious, but it is also quite likely that it would have been preserved in the postulated 'Panegyric to Aurelian' (see introduction), or in official government propaganda.

The procession began at daybreak in Rome, and was led by four royal chariots, all liberally covered with their original ornamentation of gold, silver and jewels, and half seized from Palmyra. The first had been owned by Odaenathus. The second had been donated to Aurelian by the king of the Persians. The third had been crafted for Queen Zenobia so that she might use it when she entered Rome. As the writer remarks: and so she did, but not in the way she had planned. A fourth royal chariot, taken from the late Cannabaudes, king of the Goths, was led by stags and carried the emperor himself. It was driven all the way up to the temple on the Capitoline Hill, where the stags would be sacrificed to Jupiter Best and Greatest. Zonaras, using an earlier source now lost, claims that Aurelian's chariot was led by elephants, following the precedent set by the victorious Republican general Pompey. Jerome claims that Zenobia and Tetricus 'preceded' the chariot of Aurelian, but he uses this phrase often about those conquered and is probably speaking figuratively.

There followed assorted wild beasts: in order, twenty elephants, 200 tamed beasts from Libya and Palestine, four tigers, assorted giraffes, elks and other animals, and finally, as a taste of what was to come, no fewer than 800 pairs of gladiators. The tamed beasts would later be donated to the Roman citizenry, so that there accrued no costs to the treasury for maintaining them.

Next in line were numerous bound captives taken from all the defeated nations, and barbarians, each carrying placards to state their origin. From the east, there were Palmyrenes and Egyptians; from the

barbarians, groups labelled variously as 'Goths', 'Alans' (i.e. Vandals) and 'Suebians' (i.e. Alamanni and Juthungi) from north of the western Danube, Roxolani and Sarmatians, presumably including the Carpi, from north of the eastern Danube, and 'Germans' and 'Franks' from east of the Rhine. One placard claimed that some captives were 'Amazons', a legendary race of female warriors, but the victims were actually female Goths captured while fighting in male attire. Now came representatives of all the races and tribes that were friendly to Rome, again carrying their placards to identify themselves to the cheering Roman population. The list of representatives from the east was a long one, for the ease with which Rome had overthrown Palmyra had caused a sensation. There were Axomites and Blemmyes from deep to the south of Egypt, Arabs, Saracens and Persians, and even Hiberians from the Russian Caucasus, Bactrians from their valleys east of the Aral Sea and Indians from their sub-continent.

And now came Tetricus and his son, not bound but wearing Gallic trousers. They were followed by the sad figure of Zenobia, former Queen of the East. Zenobia was loaded with jewels so heavy that she could barely stagger. Feet and hands were bound with golden fetters and a gold chain around her neck was supported by a Persian clown. There may have been some murmurs at the fact that a Roman senator was being led as a captive in a Roman Triumph, but Tetricus was spared the humiliation of Zenobia and probably his place in the procession was purely representative of Aurelian's achievements. After all, Tetricus had himself placed the breakaway empire into the real emperor's hands.

The remainder of the procession was described as 'glorious indeed'. Gold crowns were displayed, presented by various Roman cities. Then came representatives of the Roman people themselves, their guilds and associations. Then a squadron of armoured cavalry, followed by the splendour of the regal booty that Aurelian and his army had seized, predominantly from Palmyra. One of the items taken from the east was a spectacular type of vivid purple garment that would later be displayed at Rome in the Temple of Jupiter. Subsequent attempts by the Romans to emulate its hue never succeeded.

The conquering army came next, whose marching feet were normally prohibited from the streets of Rome. It was customary for the troops to make wisecracks about their victorious general during a Triumph, but Aurelian must have been so far ahead that he could certainly not have heard the jokes above the tumult. Finally came the

senators, subdued we are told, and perhaps fearing for the future now that their emperor had come home.

Having made his sacrifices in the Temple of Jupiter, Aurelian dedicated a gold statue in the Roman Forum, by the Temple of Concord, to the '*Genius* of the Roman People'. The French author Homo⁹ wrote in 1904 that there existed also a statue of Mercury erected by Aurelian in 275 beside the Sacred Way in the same forum, but it seems to have disappeared since (perhaps during Mussolini's excavation with bulldozers of the forum). The procession reached the Capitoline Hill at nine in the evening, when it would have been becoming dark, and arrived at the Imperial Palace late indeed. On the following day there were the usual celebrations: plays in the theatres, races in the Circus, wild beast hunts and gladiatorial fights, including a naval battle. Many of the gladiators would have been taken from the former captives.

There survives a monument commemorating the Triumph, erected in the Sacred Way running through Rome's various imperial forums by his urban prefect Orfitus in 274. The stone, one of only three known for Aurelian from the Sacred Way, is interesting primarily for the few titles that Orfitus acknowledges for Aurelian, and is reproduced on [page 120](#), together with its translation. Note the absence of any claim to victory over Tetricus, or over Gaul.

Aurelian showed astonishing clemency towards the defeated Zenobia, widely attested in the ancient literature. He gave her a pension, made her marry a Roman senator and she became a typical Roman matron on a gifted estate at Tibur (modern Tivoli), 20 miles (32 kilometres) from Rome, bringing up her children as Roman citizens. Jerome even claims that her descendants were still known to exist at Rome in his time. Less surprising was the honour shown to Tetricus and his son. Tetricus was made *corrector* (governor, with administrative powers greater than the existing high-ranking *juridicii*, ex-consular judges) of the Italian province of Lucania in south-western Italy, while his son became a senator. They threw a banquet to celebrate the creation of a splendid mosaic in their huge villa on the Caelian Hill in Rome, showing Tetricus and his son handing over the keys of Gaul to Aurelian while receiving back the senatorial toga. Prominent among the guests was the emperor himself, who asked whether it was better to be a ruler in Gaul or a senator at Rome. The answer, requiring both tact and honesty, was the latter.

Aurelian in Rome (Autumn 274)

Aurelian had returned to Rome for his Triumph. He had appeared previously in 271, to settle the rebellion there and to make preparations for his march against Zenobia, and presumably he had dropped in, so to speak, while switching his armies from Palmyra to northern Italy prior to the invasion of Gaul. It is very likely that it was now that Aurelian married Ulpia Severina, and that she became his empress (*Augusta*) as was by now commonplace for any member of the aristocracy who married a sitting emperor. Her name begins to appear on Egyptian tetradrachm coins minted from August 274 to August 275 (Aurelian's 'Year 6' of rule),¹⁰ and then on other coins, minted either with Aurelian or for herself alone. She is always titled *Augusta* on every known coin that bears her name. It may be that Aurelian finally had the opportunity to marry, after almost three years on campaign, or that he wanted to create a dynasty.

Severina's profile on the coins depicts her as a typical Roman matron with plaited hair. She is traditionally the daughter of Aurelian's alleged adoptive father, Ulpius Crinitus, although not even the Augustan Histories add that claim. However, she may well have originated from the Danube area, like her husband, where Trajan's forename Ulpius was very common. Although we know little of Severina, it seems that she was at least well respected and possibly played an important role behind the scenes, as would befit an *Augusta*. There are several eastern inscriptions invoking her name, while she was honoured on coins produced at Alexandria even after Aurelian's death. An inscription¹¹ found in Spain describes her as 'Mother of the Camps, of the Senate and of the Country'. According to the unreliable Augustan Histories, Aurelian had also a daughter, but no sons. He held a yearly celebration of the *Sigillaria* for his wife and daughter (neither is named) 'as though he were a private citizen'. The *Sigillaria* occupied the last day of the lengthy December celebration of the *Saturnalia*, and were traditionally the occasion when small gifts were exchanged.

At last Aurelian could give his full attention to trying to set right the economic woes of the empire. Years of constant civil wars had taken their toll on every part of the Roman economy. Taxation was steep, the money was virtually worthless and inflation was rampant. The net effect of these problems was to blight trade, stifle investment and render general misery to the population as a whole. The only saving grace appeared to be that the relentless plague of the previous twenty years had finally dissipated.

To give a measure of the extent of the debasement of the *denarius*,

whereas in the second century AD this coin would buy a day's unskilled labour, now the same labour cost about fifty *denarii*. Harris¹² cites strong evidence from Egyptian papyri that there was 'a viciously sharp acceleration in prices in the AD 270s, a roughly tenfold increase in AD 274/5'. It was caused by 'an abrupt loss of confidence in the silver coinage ... in which the government was obliged to improve the coinage's precious metal value'. This was presumably due to a 'matter of panic', since Aurelian's early coins were not markedly worse than their predecessors. Harris points out that banking and credit lines were drying up during the third century due to inflation caused by debased money. It only required some nervous bankers to decide that they would no longer accept the official coins (with their tiny silver content) at full value for tax gatherers and borrowers to have to follow suit. The loss of confidence appears to have been empire-wide, and required Aurelian's immediate action.

Next on Aurelian's agenda, then, was economic recovery. And seizure of the riches of Palmyra, coupled with restoration of the lost tax revenue from the more prosperous east, made this goal more readily achievable than for many years.

Coinage¹³

Under his predecessor, Claudius, the silver currency of the empire had become little more than a small circle of base metal with a 2 per cent wash of silver that rubbed off easily. The main difficulty was a shortage of silver bullion, and unfortunately Palmyra's wealth did not remedy this particular problem. It is believed that the silver mines in Dalmatia and Spain were becoming exhausted or, at any rate, short of workers. However, there was plenty of gold to reform the *aureus* coin, while Aurelian was at least able to stabilize the silver currency at a level acceptable to all.

Gaius Valerius Sabinus had served as Aurelian's trusted mint master, replacing the rebellious Felicissimus, since 271. He was based at the largest mint in Mediolanum after the emperor's closure of the mint at Rome following the disturbances there. The mint at Mediolanum was moved to Ticinum (Pavia, northern Italy) in early 274, and Sabinus moved with it. The mint at Rome had also reopened (perhaps in 273), but never regained its former pre-eminence. It is certain that Sabinus must have taken a major hand in the reforms that were to follow, the most significant attempt to improve the currency that had ever been undertaken in imperial times. Previously the name of the game had been almost continual debasement. Strangely, the

Greek historian Zosimus is the only ancient writer to comment on the overhaul of the coinage, although chemical analyses – and the physical appearance of the new coins – tell their own story. The emperor himself would undoubtedly have taken an interest in the design of the coins, and it is perhaps significant that he almost always appears in armour. Some of the new coinage was issued in the name of his wife, Ulpia Severina, whose image appears for the first time now on the reverse of *antoniniani* showing Aurelian.¹⁴

Authentic Aurelian Inscriptions.

CIL VI 1112

Triumphal inscription set up in 274 in the Sacred Way, in the Roman Forum.

IMP•CAES•L•DOMITIO
AVRELIANO•PIO•FELICI
INVICTO•AVG•PONTIF•MAXIMO
GOTHICO•MAX•GERMANICO•MAX•
pARTHICO•MAX•CARPICO•MAX•
trIB•POT•V•CONS•ii•DESIG•III•IMP•III•
p•p•prOCONS•RESTITVTORI•ORBIS•
fortissiMO•ET•VICTORIOSISSIMO
PRINCIPI
virius•orfitus•v•c•PRAEF•VRBI•
devotus•numini•maiESTATIQ•EIVS•

Items in lower case are missing from the damaged monument, and have been filled in by analogy with similar inscriptions elsewhere. Orfitus is known to have been city prefect in 273/274. He had previously been a consul when Claudius was emperor (270).

Translation: *To emperor caesar L. Domitius Aurelian, pious, lucky, invincible emperor, chief priest, vanquisher of the Goths, Germans, Parthians (= Palmyra), Carpi. Tribunary power for the fifth time, Consul for the second time, consul designate for the third time, hailed conqueror for the third time. Father of the Country, Governor, Restorer of the World, our most strong and victorious prince. Virius Orfitus, the most honourable, City Prefect, dedicated [it] to the divine presence of his majesty.*

CIL XII 5548 = CIL XVII-02 00158

IMP/CAES

LUC/DOM

AURELIANO
P•FEL•INV
AUG
PONT MAX
GERM•MAX
GUTICO•MAX
CAR•MAX
PRO•V•INP
III COS
PP

XXXVIII [sic]

(The word 'PRO' above is a corruption of TR(ibunica) (p)O(testate).
'INP' = 'IMP'.)

The inscription above was found in Narbonensis Gaul, and therefore must have been written after the reunification of Gaul with Rome in 274. That which follows was found at Uzappa, in the province of Africa. 'D D P P' = 'By order of the councillors with public money'.

AE (1969/70) 00646

IMP•CAES
L•DOMITIO
AVRELIANO
PIO•FELICI
AVG•PONTI/
FICI•MAXIMO
GERMANICO
MAXIMO•GOTHI/
CO•MAXIMO•TRI/
BVNICIAE•POTES/
TATIS•PATRI•PATRIAE
COS•II•MVNICIPES•VZAPPEN/
SES•DEVOTI•NUMINI•MAIESTATI/
Q•EIVS•D•D•P•P

Aurelian and Sabinus made their major attempt to reform the currency, in which no one retained any confidence, after Aurelian's

restoration of the empire in 274, or possibly even the previous year when the treasures of Palmyra had been newly brought to Rome. The new *antoninianus* was stamped from a superior die and appears to have contained originally 5 per cent silver, including the wash on the surface, although the leaching effect of the soil over the centuries means that those coins recovered today contain only about 4 per cent silver. The issuing mints mostly stamped the legend 'XX.I' (20:1) on the new coins, a guarantee that they were worth at least one twentieth (5 per cent) of the same size coin made from solid silver.¹⁵ The weights of coins were also stabilized so that there was much less individual variation from one to another. Indeed, the most casual inspection of examples stored in the British Museum shows that the new coins were markedly superior to their predecessors, in weight, uniformity and physical appearance. The new coins contained an average 28 per cent more silver than their predecessors,¹⁶ which required a huge commitment of scarce silver. By contrast, the Egyptian tetradrachm produced at Alexandria actually declined in silver content, both throughout the third century and through Aurelian's reign, and was even reduced in weight (some 15-20 per cent) while heavier variants were removed from circulation. Somewhat inevitably, perhaps, production of coins from Alexandria increased.

Webb and Mattingly,¹⁷ following the work of the nineteenth-century Austrian numismatist Rohde, reckoned that Aurelian coins fell into three groups: 1. Prereform, with crude portraiture and poor lettering. The emperor looked elderly, stern and ugly, but the execution of this style improved over time. 2. A change in style, to portray the emperor as younger and more genial. These coins also possessed better lettering and finally higher silver content. 3. Marks of value were now added, to guarantee the quality of the coin. Thus the third group generally coincides best with the reformed coinage, with its improved silver content.

Webb cites these figures for metal content in typical 'silver' Aurelian coins:

<i>Metal</i>	<i>1. Pre-reform %</i>	<i>2. Early-reform %</i>	<i>3. Late reform %</i>
Silver	2.6	4.3	4.4
Copper	89.3	87.7	89.0
Tin	3.4	2.9	3.1
Lead	3.3	0.9	1.9
Others*	1.4	4.2	1.6

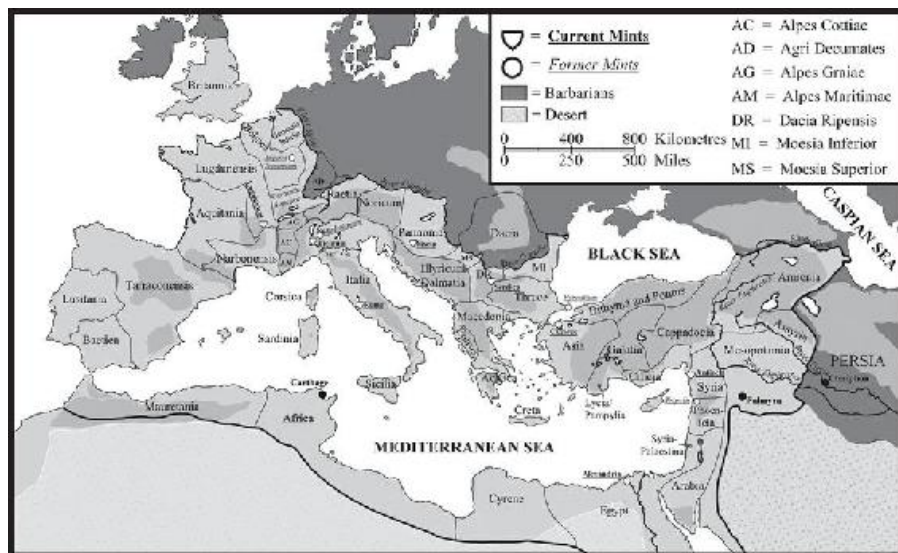
(* Predominantly zinc, iron and gold.)

For some time now, gold coins had been so variable in weight that it is impossible to say how they were standardized. Aurelian's new solid gold *aureus* was set to fifty per pound weight of gold, and also bears a guarantee: 'IL' (1:50). The number of 'silver' coins that would buy an *aureus* is unknown. The new production of superior quality 'silver' coins meant that there was once again a demand for lesser coins for minor purchases. Copies of the debased *denarius* were again issued, bearing the inscription 'VSV', which is taken to stand for *usualis*, or usual value. The details of how the token bronze small change was fixed in relation to the other coins are unclear; it is thought that Aurelian decreed that five *denarii* were equivalent to twenty *sestertii*, thereby fixing the relative values of the new 'silver' coin and the bronze change. He would not be the first emperor to set relative coin values by decree. As discussed previously, the legend 'SC' ('by senatorial decree') has now vanished from the bronze coins. Some of the older coins in circulation were over-stamped with their new values.

Prior to the reform of the currency, the gold coins for Aurelian had shown only three types of reverse: the emperor's radiant head; the legend *Dacia Felix*; and the legend 'P M TR P P P' (*Pontifex Maximus, Tribunicia Potestas, Pater Patriae*). The new gold coins showed a much wider range of types. The name of the new 5 per cent silver coin is unknown. It is frequently described as a super-radiate, or even as an 'Aurelianus',^{18 19} a name that has not really caught the scholarly imagination. Bourne has an interesting suggestion: there is slight evidence that the new coin might have been called a *bicharacta* (or a 'bicharacta coin'). Erism et al revealed in a paper²⁰ an inscription from Aphrodisias Cariae in the province of Asia that appeared to be part of Diocletian's Edict of Maximum Prices (Diocletian's attempt to control inflation). The text refers to a *bicharacta*. The inscribed stone was fragmentary, and at least one extra, undocumented, portion was known to the British Museum. Taken together, the two stones provide a text that can be translated as '*bicharacta* money ... a coin that is

known in most of the world as a four-*denarius*'. Aurelian's coins (and those of his successors) produced by the eastern mints were distinguished by having two figures (bi-characters) on the reverse.

Aurelian also called in the near worthless currency that had been circulating, replacing it with his better quality money. These measures helped to improve confidence in the coinage, and the production of 'XXI' 'silver' coins would be prolific for about twenty years more, until the reforms of Diocletian at the end of the third century. However, the 'XL' marking for Aurelian's new gold coins would not survive his death.



Roman Mints in AD 275.

It is baffling to discover that, uniquely, the new Gallic mint at Lugdunum issued 'silver' coins of quality inferior to that of Aurelian's new coinage, and that these coins also lacked the silver guarantee. Moreover, coin hoards suggest that the older, debased coinage of Tetricus was actually preferred in Gaul to the superior new coins. This preference has been the cause of much speculation, with new rebellions in Gaul being postulated (perhaps that of Faustinus, already mentioned) but without any definite conclusion being yet available. It is also unclear to what extent Aurelian's new coins were circulated in Britain. A large coin hoard in England, which had been buried at the beginning of the fifth century, shows a wide range of Roman coins, including some dating as far back as Republican times, but only two show Aurelian's head. Again, recoveries of coins from Roman military sites in Britain show few from the period of Aurelian's reforms, while there are many 'radiate copies', inferior imitations made by local

mints. One obvious explanation is that, when Aurelian exchanged his new coins for old, the exchange rate seemed fair in most of the empire, but he might have required a worse rate for the inferior currency of the recent Gallic Empire.

Aurelian's treasury issued many new coins, from mints at Mediolanum (later at Ticinum, the most important mint), Siscia (second largest), Rome, Cyzicus and Serdica, the last being a new mint set up for evacuees from the old province of Dacia and its garrisons. After the fall of Zenobia, Aurelian had regained the use of the mints at Antioch and Alexandria. The latter was always an oddball, issuing coins with Greek, rather than Latin, lettering. There was also a mint at Tripolis, in the eastern province of Phoenicia, after 273, but its output was small and it was soon closed. Another small mint was that at Byzantium, which had been closed before the new currency came into being. Aurelian wanted to maintain tight control over the mints, after the disasters of the riot at Rome and the unrelated seizure of Augusta Treverorum by the Rhine armies. Four civic mints producing bronze small change would survive for a while in Asia Minor but, after the emperor's death, even these would be closed down by his successors.

Generally speaking, the army's requirements were requisitioned from the local population where the troops were stationed. A rare Egyptian papyrus²¹ records the Oxyrhynchus council debating payment rates to merchants and weavers for delivery of army clothing during the reign of Aurelian. The weavers had petitioned the council for more money, citing a rise in the cost of materials and wages. It seems that the price of a warp of weaving yarn was forty-nine tetradrachms, but the 'treasury' had paid only eleven. The council offered a further nineteen tetradrachms – still inadequate.

The measure of Aurelian's military achievements can be seen from the inscriptions on the coins from this period:

Restitutor Orbis (Restorer of the World)

Pacator Orbis (Pacifier of the World)

Restitutor Gentis (Restorer of the People)

Restitutor Orientis (Restorer of the East)

Pacator Orientis (Pacifier of the East)

Pax Aeterna (Eternal Peace; how often wished by previous emperors on their coins, and how rarely achieved)

Pax Augusti (Peace of the Emperor).

Legal reforms

Aurelian cracked down hard on corruption, extortion and on plots against himself. He was especially harsh with government officials convicted of fraud, theft or extortion, punishing them much more severely than was required by the military code. Although details are scanty (Aurelius Victor and the Augustan Histories provide the only information, and they seem to have differed in their translation of what was probably a common Greek source), it is evident that considerable physical suffering was inflicted, rather than simply recall to Rome or a nominal fine. We may assume that provincial administration took a turn for the better.

The title of *corrector* was already, but barely, known by the middle of the third century as a governor's appointment, most recently seen with Aurelian's new ally Tetricus, but seems to have been confined to Italy and Sicily.²² The title would become popular with later emperors. A startling change, then, was the appointment of the senator C. Firmus as *corrector* for Egypt before early 274, evidenced in an Egyptian inscription and a papyrus.²³ Egypt, the granary of Rome, had always been a highly sensitive province, and emperors since Augustus himself had always chosen to rule it personally. The senator's name was the same as that claimed for the Egyptian pretender in 273, with all the possibilities of confusion that might occur in ancient histories or modern assignments of inscriptions.

The senators at Rome had been little more than figureheads for years, rubber-stamping the decrees of emperors present in Rome or absent on campaigns. Aurelian showed considerable tact and diplomacy in seeking their aid and advice, but their representation in the civil service and in the army continued to be restricted in favour of knights who had demonstrated their abilities. It seems that the emperor had reversed his own, earlier enthusiasm for retaining the improved mutual co-operation seen between his predecessor Claudius and the Senate. The role of some senators in the uprising at Rome in 271 could not have helped. On the other hand, others would have been his own appointees to make up losses in their ranks, while selected senators were invited expressly to join his new college of priests for the Sun (see below). Vopiscus (Augustan Histories) claims in one place that the Senate held him in fear; in another that he was regarded as the senators' taskmaster.

He enacted some important new laws. One popular measure was to cancel all arrears to the Roman treasury by burning the public records, following precedents set first by the ancient Greeks and in

imperial times by Hadrian (118) and Marcus Aurelius (178). This is attested by Aurelius Victor and the Augustan Histories, probably following the same original source, and confirmed indirectly by Ammianus,²⁴ who states that a vicious governor under the reign of Valens (364–378) had sought to recover all debts dating back to the time of Aurelian. Aurelian also suppressed the nuisance caused by embezzlers and informers. Most Roman emperors had relied on the evidence of spies for reasons as diverse as stopping treason and checking tax evasion. The whole system was extremely unreliable since it gave ample opportunity for informers to give false information for reasons of spite or greed; they received a 25 per cent cut of any fines arising from successful prosecution. The Romans did not, of course, have a proper police force, an invention whose time was not to come until the famous London Bow Street Runners of the late eighteenth century.

One of Aurelian's laws was that imperial rescripts (judgements passed by the emperor) had the full force of law indefinitely, and were not specific for the current year in which they were legislated. Other ordinances were directed at improving public morality, and some survived to be incorporated into the sixth-century Codex by Justinian, an east Roman emperor who published Roman laws.²⁵ Marriage laws and the rights of minors and of the family head were reinforced. According to the Augustan Histories, Aurelian planned to restore to married women their *Senaculum* (an open-air meeting place) provided that those who were also priestesses should rank highest. There is no other confirmation of this information. Free-born women were not allowed to serve as concubines, and the purchase of eunuchs was restricted to senators, apparently on the prosaic ground that the price had become so high that no one else could properly afford them.

Aurelian's Laws in Justinian's Codex

The eastern Roman emperor Justinian (527–565) authorized the production of several volumes of a 'Digest' of existing Roman Law, organizing and summarizing both Republican Law and those decrees of his imperial predecessors that were still valid. The Digest has survived intact, while a 'Codex' lists individual one-off judgements ('rescripts') assigned to those emperors who created them. Among the legal pronouncements of this huge work only seven are attributed directly to Aurelian, while two decrees by later emperors refer to earlier judgements by Aurelian. All but one are found in the Codex.¹

As described earlier in this book, Aurelian was not one of Rome's

great reformers. He was far more interested in the restoration of the normal Roman way of life for civilians, while his foreign military campaigns left him little time to formulate laws at Rome. The evidence of Justinian's Digest and common sense both suggest that he created far fewer Roman laws than did other emperors of equal or even lesser period in office. Vopiscus, Aurelian's unreliable biographer, attributes to Aurelian the passage of 'many' enactments (listed earlier), including the important principle that imperial pronouncements should have effect until countermanded. This rescript still exists in Justinian's Codex and is dated to 270, the beginning of Aurelian's rule, by the consuls it names. However, one of the original scribes made an error and attributed the rescript to the long-deceased emperor Severus Alexander.

The surviving Aurelian directives in the Codex were not written by the emperor personally; they were drafted in legal language by his legal staff and signed by Aurelian. Thus the words are not his, and his signature has not survived into the Codex. Latin is an ancient and originally primitive language, and many of its words acquired different meanings even during the later Roman Empire. Therefore it is an ambiguous language, which makes exact translation difficult. One might suppose that legal Latin ought to be made especially clear, or unambiguous, but translations made in modern times seem to show some surprising disagreements. One of Aurelian's legal pronouncements¹(iv) concerned whether the illustrious Saturninus, having approached the emperor, had taken up his right to make a sale. Scott² then translates the next clause as 'for the consent of the emperor takes the place of [i.e. replaces] a decree of the governor'. But the literal translation is 'for after the same fashion of the decree of the governor, the permission of the emperor *accedit*'. *Accedit* means 'comes near, resembles, assents, approaches'.³ Scott implies that the governor's early decision has been replaced by that of the emperor. (Saunders⁴ agrees, arguing that the point of this rescript is to emphasize the emperor's authority over that of the governor.) But the literal translation implies only that the emperor agreed with or assented to the decree of the governor. By implication, contemporary speakers of Latin could understand the real meaning either from context or by the wording. Of course, it would be a foolish governor who ignored the wish of the emperor, so perhaps Scott is right by context. But it would be interesting to know why Aurelian's legal office felt obliged to chase up the original query in this manner. A feasible alternative is that Aurelian's judgement stood in for the

governor, while the latter was in some way incapacitated, and Aurelian desires only to know if the governor has yet acted, while emphasizing that the emperor's decision is of equal value for this and similar purposes. Thus, the emperor's permission can stand as substitute for the local governor's decree.

Directly attributable to Aurelian is a law concerning marriage gifts. Can a marriage gift made on the day of the wedding, but when it is unclear whether the gift was donated by bridegroom or husband, be taken back later by the husband? This was an important issue in an age of marriage dowries, perhaps later followed by divorce. Aurelian's answer: the husband can withdraw the gift if he made it in his house (now the joint home), but not if it was made in the bride's house. The ruling follows old precedent that gifts between husband and wife are invalid.

Another petition concerns the contested release of a slave, set free by the will of his deceased master but disputed by the heir. Aurelian's response: by taking possession of the estate, the heir has agreed to the terms of the master's will. An old law forbade those underage from inheriting property, but they could obtain a release from the emperor. Aurelian gave the judgement that those who obtained the emperor's release in this way could not hope to have their property restored to them intact, however incompetent they might have been in its administration, for fear that those who contracted with them might feel defrauded by the imperial authority. We find also an apparent decision about the disputed possession of a farm (the text is now corrupt) and an opaque judgement concerning the role of the father with respect to his emancipated son and the son's nomination as a Decurion: 'When you say you have appealed, you show that the lawsuit pertains to you. For you were only able to oppose the nomination of the son and not to give agreement to the office conferred on him.' The emperor Constantine quotes and softens an important Aurelian edict when the latter had attempted to re-tax abandoned Roman lands. Aurelian had declared that, if the original owners could not be discovered, the local Decurions (civic leaders) were to be held liable for the tax. Constantine spread the burden over the whole community.

The joint emperors Diocletian and Maximian quote a decree of Aurelian: that children of the 'First Centurion of the (Army) Reserve' could not be held liable for their fathers' debts if they had taken neither his position nor his possessions, even if no other heirs existed.

1. *Codex Justinianus*: (i) 1.23.2, (ii) 2.44.1, (iii) 5.3.6, (iv) 5.72.2, (v) 7.16.7, (vi) 10.62.2, (vii) 11.59.1, (viii) 12.62.4. In addition, (ix) *Mosaicarum et Romanarum Legum Collatio in Fragmenta Vaticana*, ed. Mommsen, T. (1890). Can be found online at https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6968663M/Fragmenta_vaticana
2. Scott, S.P., *The Justinian Codex*, LXXI (1932), www.constitution.org/sns/sns.htm
3. ‘Accedit.’ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. Glare P.G.W., Oxford University Press (1996). Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford University Press (2002). Souter, A., *A Glossary of Later Latin to 600 AD*, Oxford University Press (1964) has no entry; i.e. no change in use of the word in the post-classical period
4. Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991), p. 373.

It seems that the emperor was a stern ruler at Rome, who tried to bend military law to fit civilian cases. The restrictions of Roman Law were put aside whenever Aurelian felt that either his person or the State was threatened. Despite all the honorary titles awarded to him, such as *Restitutor Orbis* as we have seen, he declined to use any title ‘save that of the sword’. Contemporary accounts suggest that Aurelian felt that he could rule all the Roman world, not as sovereign but as conqueror. Aurelian was the first princeps to call himself *Dominus* (Lord), a practice later adopted by other emperors such as Diocletian; the first to behave openly like a king. However, the royal diadem was not used overtly on coins until the ascent of the emperor Constantine. Aurelian’s wife, Severina, appears on coins as *Domina*.

Aurelian took consulships in the years 271, 274 and 275.²⁶ They

are numbered in sequence I, II and III in the *Fasti*, so it seems unlikely that he could have held a *suffectus* or *ornamenta* consulship. (See [Appendix B](#) for a description of the consulships.) As mentioned previously, his first consulship was with T. Pomponius Bassus. For 272, the consuls were Quietus and Veldumnianus, both names being unusual. Consequently, and for want of any alternative, Quietus has sometimes been equated improbably with Postumius Quietus, known from an inscription in a Christian catacomb. Junius Veldumnianus might have been the ‘urban praetor’ known from an inscription. The consuls for 273 are listed as Tacitus and Placidianus, the first being plausibly M. Claudius Tacitus, the next emperor, while the second is widely assumed to have been the loyal Julius Placidianus holding the line in southern Gaul for Claudius and Aurelian. Aurelian’s co-consul in 274 was Capitolinus, about whom nothing else is known although his name appears on an inscription with Aurelian. Another loyal general, Marcellinus, who had refused to join the second Palmyrene rebellion in 273, was Aurelian’s co-consul in 275.

As the emperor dated the *Tribunicia Potestas* from late 270, he should have possessed a total of six *Potestas* awards (270–275 inclusive), but inscriptions tell us that actually he held seven. Reconciliation of dates shows that Aurelian took the honour on an extra occasion, during 274 and probably on the event of his Triumph. We know that other emperors did the same occasionally. More baffling are the dates that appear in papyri from Egypt, where Zenobia ruled through her son Vaballathus. The Egyptian scribes – who dated according to the year of their ruler with each new year beginning on 29 August – started by making the first year of Aurelian’s reign equal to the fourth year of Vaballathus’, having backdated the rule of Vaballathus in spring 271 to the death of Odaenathus in 267/8, but then other dates go awry.

The confusion was cleared up convincingly by Professor Rea in 1972.²⁷ Aurelian’s first year was counted correctly from the year in which he was recognized by the Senate, late in 270. Thus year September 270 to August 271 is 1 Aurelian = 4 Vaballathus. Subsequently, Aurelian wanted to pretend that the reign of his rival, Quintillus, was unlawful, so that he, Aurelian, counted his first year from early August 270. Thus year 270/271 was now 2 Aurelian = 4 Vaballathus. This would have been confusing for the eastern scribes, particularly because Aurelian’s writ did not yet run in Egypt. They kept to the original system.

Bread and circuses

Successive emperors had always found it necessary to keep the huge population of the city of Rome sweet, largely because of the disturbances they created when upset. Rome was still the capital of the Roman world, even if emperors rarely had time to reside there, and the capital city was resplendent with its treasures. No sane emperor could have wanted a general uprising at Rome. A policy of 'bread and circuses', i.e. the distribution of free bread or corn and the provision of an endless supply of entertainment in the Roman amphitheatres, had been pursued since the time of Augustus. Although we have no precise figures for Aurelian's time, in year 354 we know that there were no fewer than 177 days per year allocated as public holidays or festivals in Rome, when games would be celebrated.²⁸ It was perhaps an interruption of the grain supply to Rome by Palmyra that had provoked the riots in the capital city in 271.

With the new wealth to hand, and the improved reliability of supplies from Egypt, once again under central administration, Aurelian was able to increase the free distribution of bread to the large qualifying population in Rome. When he had set out for the east, he had promised the people of Rome that, if he returned successful, he would give each man 'crowns weighing two pounds'. Somewhat naturally, they assumed he meant crowns of gold, but no emperor could afford that. Instead, he gave each man a crown made up of a special bread, promising a hereditary right to a day's allowance of bread for evermore; more than 100,000 metal tickets were issued. The amount of bread that was sold by the bakers at one fixed price was increased by 1 ounce to 2 pounds per day, and this was of benefit to the entire population at Rome. Jones²⁹ speculates that it was now that the corn dole was changed into a bread ration.

The importance of the mills (turned elsewhere by oxen or other animals) and bakeries can be judged by the fact that two aqueducts entering Rome were assigned solely to provision of hydraulic power to the mills, and that the area containing the mills and bakeries, on the sloping ground of the Janiculum Hill west of the river Tiber, had to be especially enclosed by an extension of Aurelian's wall (see diagram on [page 84](#)). Coins were struck to mark the emperor's liberality. They show the inscription *Annona Aug.* (handout of the emperor). The cost of these donations was defrayed by extra taxes in kind on those goods imported from Egypt and on which the state had a monopoly of manufacture, such as glass, paper, linen and hemp. The tax was called

the *Anabolicum*, often mentioned in papyrus inscriptions. The boatmen on the Nile and Tiber rivers were increased in number and organized into efficient guilds.

Aurelian also added pork to the Roman handouts, with olive oil and salt included at regular intervals, and it has been speculated that the disasters preceding his reign had induced starvation among the city dwellers, making the distributions essential. Improved sustenance might also have helped to end the plague;³⁰ inadequate nourishment weakens the immune system. The guild of pork butchers had enjoyed the same legal privileges as the bakers since the time of Septimius Severus (193–211), thus there was already a channel for Aurelian's distribution of free pork. In addition, the powers of the city Prefect of Supplies were increased, and it is thought that the bakers' and butchers' guilds were made into official bodies with compulsory membership; Malalas claims that the emperor wished to form guilds of workers. Although we do not know the original quantities dispensed, the free ration of pork at Rome in the fourth century amounted to 5 pounds per month, but was only available for some five months of the year. The pigs were derived predominantly from southern Italy and lost weight in transit, resulting in various compensatory regulations for the suppliers and dealers.

Aurelian even planned to add wine to the list of free handouts, financed by a tax in kind on wine imports, but this scheme may not have been implemented before the death of the emperor. He had proved to be one of the most considerate of all emperors, past or future, towards the people of Rome. Some of those consulted were critical about the extent of the emperor's generosity. 'If we give wine to the Roman people,' said one, 'there remains only to give chickens and geese.'

As a matter of fact, Aurelian almost certainly did go too far with his handouts, which increased the culture of dependency among Rome's city dwellers. This dependency arose from the Roman system of patronage, in which a patron, in this case the emperor, rewarded his clients, the people of Rome, for their loyalty. Aurelian's generosity generated a yearly burden for his successors, who might not be able to enjoy the fruits of a major conquest of a wealthy state. In later years other emperors would slowly cut back on Aurelian's munificence, but the free pork ration at Rome continued well into the fifth century. His idea of free wine was never copied by later emperors, although discounts of up to 25 per cent were occasionally provided to

qualifying inhabitants of Rome.

In addition to these perpetual benefits, Aurelian handed out clothing imported from various provinces, those made of pure linen from the provinces named Africa and Egypt being most favoured. He also made some cash donations. According to the reliable 'Chronicler of 354', 500 *denarii* were issued per person on just one occasion. The Augustan Histories record three donations. It has been suggested³¹ that 500 *denarii* would be a substantial sum to hand out in one tranche, and that the Histories' three donations probably totalled the sum stated. In either case, the issue was accompanied by coins with the inscription *Liberalitas Aug.* (generosity of the emperor).

Public buildings

Unlike his predecessors in more peaceful times Aurelian commissioned few public buildings, with the notable exception of a temple (see below). The most surprising omission is a triumphal arch, erected in the middle of Rome by most emperors to commemorate great victories. Those of Septimius Severus and Constantine can still be seen in much of their former glory in Rome today. Even the beleaguered emperor Gallienus had managed to award himself a triumphal arch for his victories in 264. Aurelian also resisted the temptation to erect a large statue of himself. Today, there is no known extant statue of the emperor Aurelian, so we know his appearance only from his coins. Even inscriptions commemorating the emperor's victories are very scarce.

The 'Chronicler of 354' relates how Aurelian caused a new camp to be created for four guard units in the Campus Agrippae, where he would also build his temple. No remains of this camp have been identified as yet. The portico of the important Baths of Caracalla burned down and was rebuilt. Inscriptions tell us of new public baths built at Grumentum (Grumento, south-western Italy) and repaired at Caesena (Cesena, north-eastern Italy).³² The Augustan Histories hint at a few major projects begun, but not completed. A public bath for winter was needed in the Transtiberine district (as the name suggests, across the river Tiber) of Rome; it was planned but apparently not started. Work commenced on 'Aurelian's Forum' at the port of Ostia, but this was diverted into public offices. (There is no archaeological evidence for the work at Ostia.³³) He also failed to adopt the practice of many of his predecessors by building a palace; indeed, he did not even like the old palace in which he resided. Instead he built a small villa and stables for himself and for his horses in the Garden of Sallust.

The garden comprised imperial grounds on the slope of the Quirinal Hill that butted up against the Aurelian Wall which was, presumably, still under construction. Here he would exercise, even when unwell. He also favoured the Gardens of Domitia on the bank of the Tiber and containing Hadrian's mausoleum.

However (still citing the dubious Augustan Histories), Aurelian promoted viticulture, possibly in connection with his scheme to distribute free wine, and arranged for the banks and the bed of the river Tiber to be made good in order to restore proper navigation. Aurelian had planned thoroughly his project for free wine. He intended to purchase untended woodland in Etruria along the Aurelian Way, which was not named after the emperor but was an ancient road, built about 220 BC, running along the north-western coast of Italy from Rome to Pisae (Pisa). Then many of his barbarian captives, held as slaves, would be settled to plant vines and subsequently to produce the wine. He even made provision for storage, labour and transportation of the finished product. It all ended when he died.

The rural population of the Roman Empire must have declined greatly in recent years, due in part to deaths caused by plague, in part to high taxation of land and in part to barbarian raids resulting in the abandonment of much of the countryside for the greater security of the walled towns. However, the Roman government was not prepared to give up the lost tax revenue. It tried every means to assign the desolate land (and its tax burden) to those who would take it on, usually with temporary tax relief typically of three years. This is doubtless what Vopiscus (Augustan Histories) has in mind when he describes work on the reclamation of waste land in Italy by the local authorities in order to encourage agriculture. Use of the land was exempt from all charges for three years, but Vopiscus adds that this tax avoidance scheme was abandoned in the following century owing to its cost to the treasury (a problem also known in our own time).

But when no takers for the untended land could be found, the Roman emperors were prepared to force the land onto others. Aurelian directed that the tax lost from deserted lands should be made up by the local council of each city, a policy that would also force them to send out their surplus occupants as labourers to work on the land, in an effort to bring agricultural land back into fruitful use and to reduce the burden of useless mouths in the cities. This edict had to be modified about two generations later by the emperor Constantine,

to provide relief to those councils too poor either to find the tax or to buy the land. Nevertheless, the modified decree survived into Justinian's sixth-century Digest of Roman Law.

Aurelian's religion

It had become customary to worship the *genius* of living emperors, and to venerate deceased emperors as one of the pantheon (collection) of Roman gods. Aurelian's home provinces in the area of the river Danube had long been accustomed to worship the Sun. It is unclear what Aurelian's early religious beliefs were, but the coins issued in the first part of his reign (270–273) show the usual collection of Roman gods, with Jupiter, father of the gods, pre-eminent.³⁴ The champion Hercules is also widely represented, as for many of Aurelian's predecessors. The ruling emperor was supposed to have a special relationship with the gods, who would bring him luck, and the closeness of Aurelian, and other emperors, to different gods is often demonstrated in the coinage. Often the god is named as the *conservator* (protector) of Aurelian. His wife Severina is frequently depicted as Juno, the wife of Jupiter. Ruling emperors were always the chief pontiffs (*Pontifex Maximus*) of the pagan religion at Rome.

There was by now rather a large collection of deities, while Christianity had introduced the concept of just one god. The idea of a single ruling divinity seems to have taken hold with the pagan population too, with several eastern cults, such as Mithras, rising in popularity. In an effort to reunite the peoples of the empire under a common religion, Aurelian reintroduced the cult of the Sun god 'Sol', who stood above all other gods but did not replace them. The Sun was intended to be the dominant, universal religion of which all other religions were simply junior representations. Although a Roman cult, it sought to appeal to the western devotees of Apollo and to the eastern rites of Mithras and Sun worship. Previously the emperors Severus, Elagabalus, Gallienus and Claudius II had all been Sun worshippers, while the Greek god Apollo was identified with light and healing.

Aurelian must have seen similar worship of Sun gods while on service in the east, especially in Egypt, Emesa and Palmyra, and he was perhaps personally persuaded that this was the true religion. In the Sun Temple of Elagabalus at Emesa he claimed to have seen the divine entity (more probably the famous black stone) that had given him victory in the battle outside the city. He is alleged to have carried out 'alterations' at the same temple.³⁵ Certainly he became a devotee

of Sol in 272/273 and, when he learned that Palmyra's temple of Bel had been looted by his victorious troops, he ordered its immediate restoration. The huge Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis in Phoenicia, 54 yards (49 metres) by 96 yards (88 metres) with fifty-eight Corinthian columns, was built in 273, when Aurelian and his troops would have been in the area. The ruins of this, and several other great temples, still remain at modern Ba'albeck in Lebanon.³⁶

We must acknowledge here that it remains unclear which of several variants of the Sun god that Sol was intended to represent; perhaps all, including Bel who was not a Sun god, were taken to be different manifestations of the same entity. There was an old Roman 'Sol', whose temple stood in the middle of the Circus Maximus, the giant racetrack at Rome. Apparently the solemn processions here were often confused by the Roman people with those of the *Armilustrum*, another parade on different dates by priests of Mars.³⁷ Aurelian reconciled the confusion by holding games at the Circus Maximus for his new god *Sol Invictus* on the same days as the *Armilustrum* (19–22 October). Thirty-six races were run on the last day of the games! These games should not be confused with the official games, the *Agones Solis*, for *Sol Invictus*, below.

Aurelian's early coins declare him to be a god (*deus*) while still living. He was proclaimed by the Serdica mint (only) as 'born to be god and lord'. Both these claims were hitherto unknown for a living emperor, although use of the word 'divine' (*divus*) to describe a deceased emperor was commonplace and would also be accorded to Aurelian after his death. Later, Aurelian did not claim that he was personally a god, but had rather been chosen by Sol to be its emperor on Earth. Later coins show the Sun handing the globe to the emperor, or authority to other gods. The Sun's image appeared on the reverse of many of Aurelian's coins. One coin shows Aurelian and Severina with the Sun shining between them. On another, a combination Sun-Jupiter figure holds out a sceptre to the emperor. The legions had to adopt the new deity in their insignia and to start Sun worship; probably not a hardship for his crack troops from the Sun-worshipping Danubian frontier. Aurelian reminded them that it was the Sun who appointed emperors, not the armies. Late coins play down the emperor's role, with inscriptions such as *Sol Dominus Imperii Romani* ('The Sun is Lord of the Roman Empire'), but rare coins add on the reverse *Aurelianus Aug(ustus) Cons(ervator)*. The implication is that the Sun rules the empire, but Aurelian defends it. Presumably we can rule out the

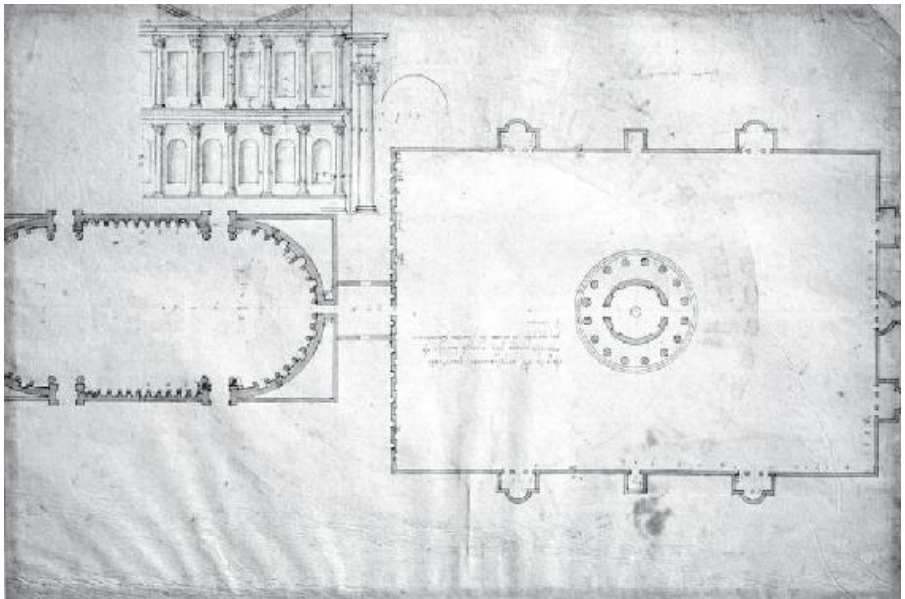
possibility that Aurelian is claiming to protect the Sun, and it would be unusual to remark that an emperor was also a consul. Notwithstanding the emphasis on the Sun god, other pagan cults continued to flourish despite their supposed junior status.

Sol appears very frequently on Aurelian's coinage just before he began his reform of the currency, and thereafter, but Sol is never found on coins minted at Alexandria,³⁸ probably to avoid inflaming the volatile and superstitious Egyptian population with their own very ancient gods. Likewise, the legend *Sol Invictus* ('the Unconquered Sun') was hitherto unknown on imperial coins.

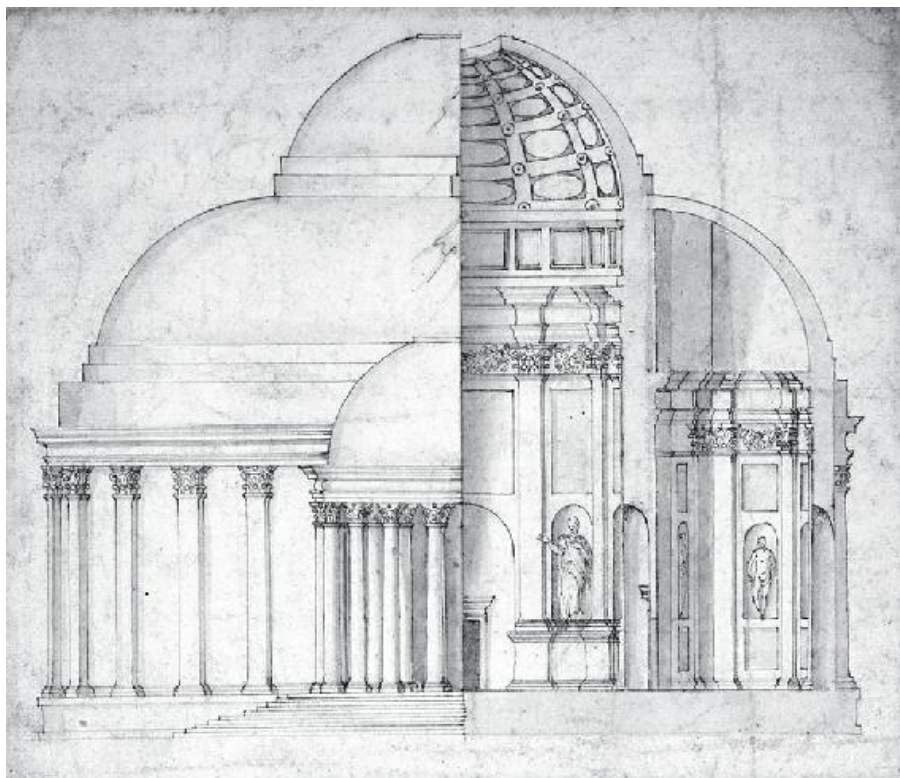
Aurelian also opened a splendid Temple of the Unconquered Sun in the Campus Agrippae, at the centre of Rome, with huge subsidies, a vast quantity of gold amounting to some 15,000 pounds weight, and gems, largely taken from Palmyra. The temple was dedicated after his Triumph at Rome in 274, perhaps on 25 December (see below), but must have been under construction for a year or more; possibly even since the emperor's first lengthy sojourn at Rome in 271. The legend found on a few coins, *Aurelianus Aug Cons*, mentioned above, has also been taken to mean that the emperor was the consecrator of the new temple. The emperor Julian (361–363) gave some details about the celebrations of the Unconquered Sun in one of his orations. The games were held every four years. After *Saturnalia* (17–23 December), there followed the *Agones Solis*³⁹ (25 December and following days), said to be the 'most splendid' games celebrated in honour of Aurelian's Unconquered Sun. After this, it was not lawful to perform any 'shows' that belonged to the previous month. The 'Chronicler of 354' adds that thirty 'games' were ordered; almost certainly chariot races, chariots having been protected by different manifestations of the Sun god from ancient times.

The temple was the most magnificent building to have been constructed in Rome since the Baths of Caracalla, which had not been finished until the reign of Severus Alexander (222–235), and is even mentioned by the Christian chronicler Jerome. It had its own college of priests, the *Pontifices dei Solis*⁴⁰ drawn from leading senators, and of equal rank to the earlier pontiffs, now known as the *Pontifices Majoress*. The equal rank ensured that no members of the old aristocracy serving already as priests for the old gods could be offended, and members could serve in both colleges. Aurelian was also the high priest of the Sun. The title *Pontifex Maximus* made him now high priest both of the Sun and of the traditional Roman deities. Severina became *Piissima*

(‘most pious’) and the Temple’s birthday – presumably its day of consecration – was assigned to the feast of the winter solstice on 25 December, made a public holiday and celebrated with races in the Circus Maximus. A century later, the triumphant Christian religion would appropriate this date for the birth celebration of its own Son. It is usually assumed that the Church made a deliberate attempt to suppress or bypass the worship of *Sol Invictus*, but a Christian tradition going back at least to Sextus Julius Africanus (c. 160–240) believed that the date of the Annunciation was 25 March, after which a nominal gestation for Christ of nine months would give His ostensible birthday as 25 December.



Outline view of remains of Aurelian’s Temple of the Sun, as sketched by Palladio. The left-hand side is South; the right-hand side is North.



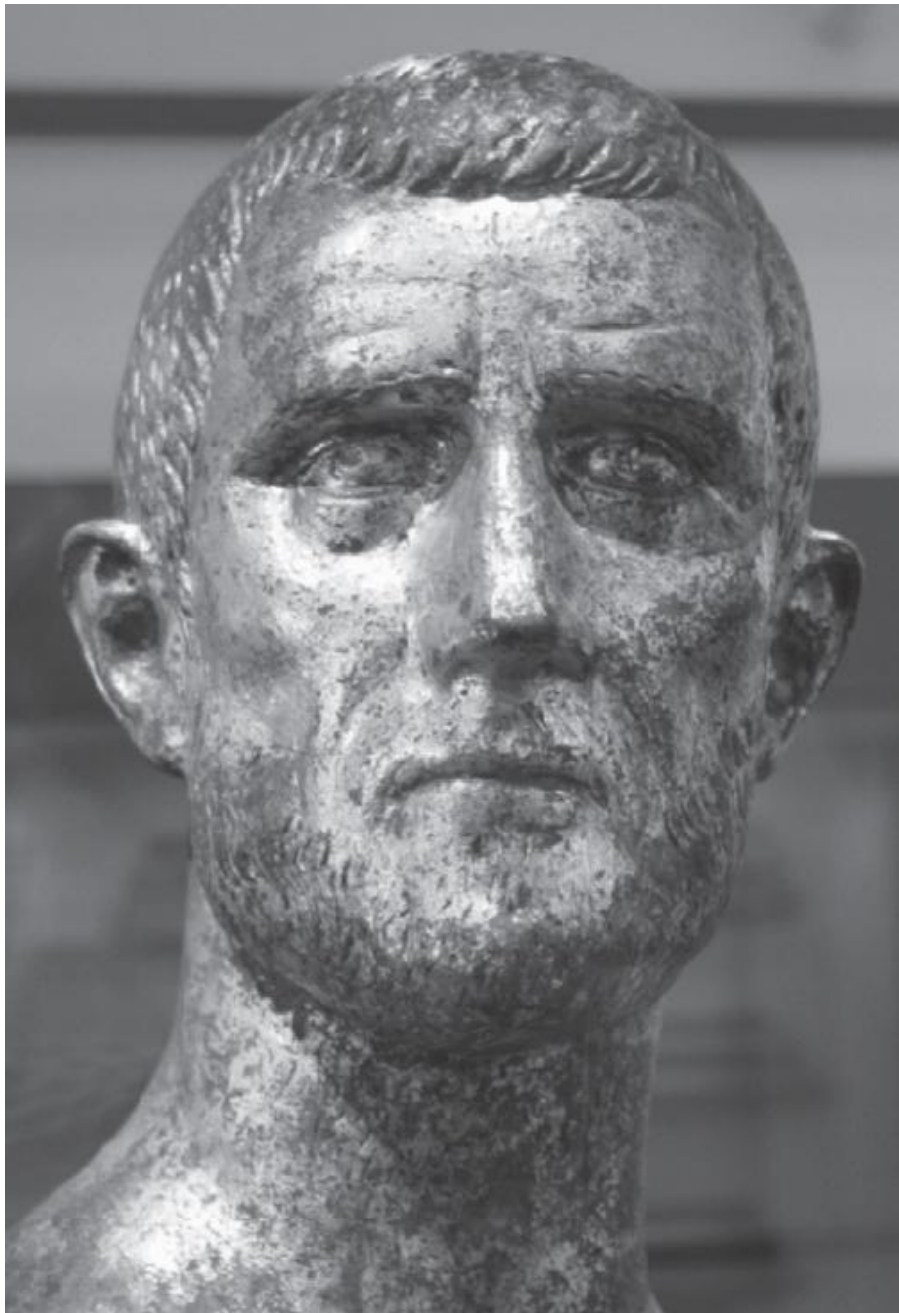
Reconstruction of the ruins, sometimes attributed to Palladio.

Both drawings © RIBA Library Drawings and Archives Collections

Is this the face of Aurelian?

In 1826, high-quality bronze busts of five Roman emperors, and one empress, were uncovered from beneath the pagan Capitoline temple in Brescia, where they had been hidden for safety towards the end of the Roman period. Three of the five emperors had the characteristic hairstyle and beards of Roman emperors of the second half of the third century. During this period, ten such emperors ruled: Gallienus, Claudius II, Aurelian, Tacitus, Probus, Carus, Carinus, Numerian, Diocletian and Maximian. The first one and the last two named are well known from other busts and statues, while Tacitus and Carinus were not deified and therefore probably would not be found in a pagan temple. Carus was bald and Numerian was his younger and insignificant son. Probus is known definitely from one other bust at Rome, and thus can be tentatively identified with one of the Brescia busts. This leaves two emperors (Claudius and Aurelian) and two busts that do not appear to be of the same individual, yet both are usually attributed to Claudius II on the basis of their resemblance to his image in coins. Coin representations varied significantly between the various

issuing mints, and it is difficult to understand why anyone would want to bury two busts of Claudius and none of Aurelian, whose achievements were greater and therefore – one might suppose – would also be represented as a god in a pagan temple. One of these two busts has a chin markedly more pointed than the other. On coins, Aurelian has generally a rounded chin, Claudius generally a pointed chin (author's observation from examples in Mattingly's coin catalogue). And thus logic leads us to assign the portrait depicted above to Aurelian, if he is represented at all among the Brescia bronzes.



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The busts are now on display at the Santa Giulia Museum, in Brescia, Italy.

The Temple of the Sun did not survive long into the Christian era,⁴¹ and the ruins are now buried between the modern Corso and the

Church of S. Silvestro in Rome, but Palladio made a sketch in the sixteenth century from the extant remains. It shows a circular temple with magnificent porphyry columns, perhaps from Palmyra, enclosed by a large, rectangular surround. The temple itself had a radius of about 34.5 yards (31.5 metres), while the rectangular surround measured 138 yards (126 metres) north-south and 94.5 yards (86.4 metres) east-west. Within the temple were placed effigies of 'Helios-Sol', the Greek-Roman Sun god, and 'Belos-Baal', the eastern manifestation. The temple had also a practical aspect. Vats of treasury wine were stored in its porticoes for sale to the public. (This is described only by the unreliable Augustan Histories source, but confirmed by inscriptions close by.)

It is evident that hitherto Aurelian and the Christian Church had enjoyed good relations. The pope (Felix) was known to the emperor and his offices were unhindered. The emperor's desire to standardize Roman religion under the Sun (*Sol Invictus*) as the dominant god may have caused him to become less tolerant, particularly as the Church would not have recognized Aurelian's role as 'God's chosen one'. After all, for Aurelian the whole point of his god was to reunite all religions peacefully. A possible further problem was that Christian or Jewish writers had put together a series of mock prophecies that purported to predict the 'future' in verse, while actually relying on a great deal of hindsight. That is, the prophecies pretended to predict the future, but were in fact written after the events they described so that the verses provide historical data in typical, vague, fortune-telling style. Some of these have survived, and are known as the *Oracula Sibyllina*; their purpose was doubtless to ridicule or discredit the real oracles. The pseudo-predictions end with the ascendancy of Odaenathus, and therefore were probably written close to Aurelian's reign.⁴² He would not have seen it as a joke.

Eusebius tells us that Aurelian had planned to initiate a new persecution of the Christians, but died before he could implement it. St Augustine acknowledged, but disputed, the argument that, just as there had been ten plagues of Egypt before the Israelites were permitted to leave, so the Christians had suffered ten imperial persecutions, starting with Nero. That of Aurelian was alleged to be the ninth in the series. Jerome also attests that it would be the ninth persecution of Christians since that of Nero, and the divine warning to Aurelian was a thunderbolt that struck close by the emperor's feet, terrifying all around. Orosius copies Jerome's tale. Aurelian's

contemporary, Lactantius, adds that the edicts had already been despatched, but had yet to reach the farthest provinces, when the emperor was struck down by divine retribution. The edicts lost their force when the reigning emperor died and the Christian tradition of several martyrs during the reign of Aurelian is almost certainly wrong.⁴³

Felix I, an energetic and influential pope, had died on 30 December 274. He had been anointed in 269, and must therefore have been well known to Aurelian, even if only by reputation. It is tempting to question whether it was the death of Felix and the appointment in January of his successor, Eutychianus, who held office until 283, that caused the break between emperor and Church. Unfortunately, nothing at all is known of Eutychianus as pope, but he might have been more dogmatic with pagans than Felix.⁴⁴

Fashion

An imperial court tends to set its own fashions that will be followed by the aristocracy. The lengthy sojourn of the emperor and the empress in Rome must have set its own precedents. The *Epitome de Caesaribus* states that Aurelian introduced the kinglike habit of adorning his garments with gilt and jewels, a practice hitherto almost unknown. Jerome, contradicting the *Epitome*, claims that Diocletian (284–305) was the first emperor to order that he be hailed as a god, and to have gems sewn into his clothing. Among a series of petty snippets vouchsafed to us by the Augustan Histories (filling the remainder of this section), we learn that Aurelian would not wear silk clothing, nor give it as a present to others. Silk was imported from the east, mostly by ship or caravan from China via India, and was considered effeminate. His wife once asked her husband if she might keep a single robe of purple silk. Aurelian's illuminating reply was: 'God forbid that a fabric should be worth its weight in gold.' The price of silk was at that time evidently equal to its weight in gold. Married women were for the first time permitted to wear purple clothing; previously it had been restricted to a much favoured bright pink or else multicoloured. Men were not allowed to wear effeminate boots, defined as those coloured in purple, wax, white or ivory.

The emperor's slaves remained clothed in the same style as when he had been a commoner. The household guard traditionally wore purple tunics, but Aurelian permitted the use of embroidered bands. Senators were allowed to employ personal message runners dressed like the emperor's runners. Aurelian introduced the idea of providing

the common people with handkerchiefs, not so that they could blow their noses, but so that they could wave them when showing approval.

Aurelian's attitude to precious metals was also interesting. He observed that nature had provided more gold than silver, yet gold was often used pointlessly for ostentation whereas silver was reserved for its proper use, i.e. coinage and goblets. We are told that he considered banning the use of gold in the form of decorative leaf, coat buttons and other frivolous uses, but never carried through the threat. The use of gold for jewellery was presumably sanctioned, as soldiers were allowed to replace their silver clasps with clasps made of gold. His personal silver vessels never exceeded 30 pounds in weight. Inconsistently, though, he permitted the use of silver ornamentation on private coaches, where previously only bronze or ivory had been allowed.

Interruptions (late 274 or early 275)

Another barbarian invasion of the province of Raetia, and/or a rebellion at Lugdunum, the former seat of Tetricus in Gaul, required Aurelian's presence in the north after his residence in Rome. The rebellion might explain the unusual output of silver coins that lacked the silver guarantee, which was mentioned previously. Both difficulties would have been suppressed quickly and harshly; this emperor was always short tempered. Vopiscus, one of the authors of the unreliable Augustan Histories, claims that Aurelian delivered the Vindelici tribe in Gaul from barbarians. Since the Vindelici were centred in Raetia, Vopiscus provides an unexpected separate confirmation of this poorly documented invasion. The same source suggests also that Aurelian may have taken the opportunity while in Raetia to restore the 'Trans-Rhine' fortified line (*limes*), guarding the Agri Decumates between the Rhine and Danube rivers. A subsequent invasion by barbarians, during the reign of the next emperor, Tacitus, was said to have broken through this line, which had previously been abandoned during the reign of Gallienus. However, there is absolutely no archaeological evidence to support the idea that these *limes* were ever restored by Aurelian.⁴⁵

The Sassanid Empire (275)

It would appear that the Roman military believed that the vicious and rapacious Sassanid monarchy in Persia, under the descendants of Shapur, who had died in 272, remained a threat to Rome's restored eastern provinces, and Aurelian amassed another substantial army to deal with the Persians. Probably there remained also a strong desire to

avenge the defeat of Valerian in 260. There is, as usual, some dispute about this in the ancient accounts. The medieval Greek chroniclers Syncellus and Zonaras, probably quoting a lost fragment of Eunapius, believe that the force was to repel a new invasion of Goths into the Balkans. Saunders⁴⁶ cites Groag's suggestion that the Greek account has been confused with a similar invasion of the Heruli under the next emperor Tacitus, but then lists reasons why Aurelian had no reason to attack the Persians. Yet two of the next three emperors (Probus, Carus) would also prepare large Roman armies for the same purpose. Of course, both versions could be right; they are not mutually exclusive. There is no reason why Aurelian should not have dealt first with the aforementioned attack by barbarians while en route to Persia, just as had happened previously while en route to Palmyra.

The force left for Asia Minor in the summer of 275. The armies passed through the Balkans where *perhaps* they dealt with an influx of barbarians. By autumn Aurelian and his legions had arrived at Caenophrurium, about halfway along the old paved road that ran between Perinthus (later named Heraclea) and Byzantium in Thrace, when he was suddenly struck down, almost out of the blue.

The death of Aurelian (September or October 275)

Aurelian's private secretary, Eros, had been accustomed to send out the emperor's legal pronouncements,⁴⁷ and had been caught in some act of fraud or forgery, perhaps extortion from the provincials. Aurelian threatened punishment, and his secretary knew only too well the emperor's reputation for temper and the probability that vengeance would be exacted. Eros appears actually to have anticipated the threat; he had previously taken the precaution of forging a list, in the emperor's handwriting, of names of senior legionary officers selected for punishment by Aurelian. Eros showed the list to some of the emperor's headquarters staff. With what horror – or, perhaps, with what guilty conscience – they saw the list produced by so credible an official can be readily imagined. In panic the officers conspired together and then they ran into the emperor's tent, where a Thracian general named Mucapor stabbed Aurelian to death. He was sixty-one years old.

The evidence of papyri is that Aurelian was killed sometime from 29 August to 10 October 275; likewise, the last Egyptian coins were issued for him after 29 August. In both cases, we must allow a month or so for the message by express courier to reach Alexandria, and then deeper Egypt. He was definitely believed to be alive at Rome on 25

April, since an inscription⁴⁸ there addresses him as *dominus noster* – ‘our (living) lord’. The announcement of his death stunned the entire Roman world. Aurelian was buried in a splendid tomb not far from where he fell and statues on columns lined the route. Among them was a statue depicting Eros’ fate. He was put on a stake and exposed to wild animals.

There is something strange about the murder of Aurelian as it has been handed down to us. The story of the mischievous secretary Eros and the sudden assassination by the general Mucapor is well attested by several Latin and Greek writers, so the basic facts are beyond dispute. Yet to try to reconstruct the scene in imagination is to cause bafflement.

Aurelian was on his way to a major military campaign against the Persians, and was in close contact with his top military officers. Suddenly, Eros rushes out with a forged list of names of officers selected for punishment. The list contains the names of all the top generals. Clearly that scenario is ridiculous. The generals would just laugh. The emperor is not about to execute all his military advisers just before a campaign. Is it a bad practical joke?

Let us try again. Eros hastens out with his forged list of names of half, or a third, or a quarter, of the top military officers. The named soldiers jump up immediately and kill Aurelian. Why did not the other generals present stop the murder, or even promise to reason with the emperor on their behalf? That scenario does not work either.

Try this: Aurelian has a normal appointment with a handful of unsuspecting officers who are innocent, or predominantly innocent, of any crime. Eros runs out with his list of their names for punishment. Despite their innocence, not one protests at the panicky idea of killing the emperor immediately. That is not impossible, but is surely unlikely.

The twelfth-century historian Zonaras, following Zosimus, provides an explanation different from the Latin writers. He claims that Eros forged a series of letters condemning individuals, rather than a list of condemned names, and that Eros then showed these privately to the officers concerned, inciting them to murder his master. Apparently not one stopped to consider his actions or to consult with others shown the same letters, despite the fact that they all rushed together into Aurelian’s tent. Vopiscus maintains that Eros had a list of names for condemnation, comprising officers who were genuinely threatened, officers who were falsely threatened, and Eros’ own name added to

give credibility.

Was there an organized conspiracy? Eros knows of the plot, but keeps silent. When his own life is threatened for some unrelated misdemeanour, he races round to the conspirators with his forged list of names. The plotters then kill Aurelian. In that case, why was no substitute emperor put forward, as had happened after the murder of Gallienus? The idea of a deliberate conspiracy does not seem to fit very well with subsequent events.

A much more promising supposition is that Aurelian had discovered corruption among several officers, as well as Eros, and he had summoned them on some pretext. Now he confronted Eros with the charge. Eros hurries out to the guilty soldiers with his list, and they rush into the emperor's tent before Aurelian can punish them. This is plausible, but we now need to explain why two later emperors, Tacitus and Probus, found it necessary to continue to pursue apparently large numbers of conspirators implicated in the assassination of Aurelian. Perhaps the later victims were members of some kind of organized racket, rather than a conspiracy against the emperor personally, and its leaders had killed Aurelian when the true purpose of their planned meeting with the emperor had been revealed. This is substantially the argument that the ancient writer Aurelius Victor implies.

Finally, we must mention the opinion of the Antiochian chronicler Malalas, before dismissing it out of hand: 'He was treacherously slain by his own army at a place called Kainos Phourios [Caenophrurium], since he had led the army poorly[!].' We can also disregard as highly improbable a recent French suggestion⁴⁹ that Eros (perhaps even a Christian) arranged the murder because he feared that the emperor was 'insane' (*fou*, apparently a mistranslation of Zonaras), of which the symptom was that the emperor was about to send out orders for the anti-Christian pogrom mentioned above.

The only certainty in this tangle is that the murder was improvised hastily, and the principal agents were arrested almost at once having had no time to plan a careful escape or a successor emperor. The other officers with the accompanying army were evidently taken also by surprise.

Epitaph

Aurelian had been emperor for about five and a half years; accounts range from five years four months to six years. The evidence of papyri suggests a reign of about five years and one month (c. October 270–c.

September 275, but Aurelian backdated his rule to August 270). He left only a daughter, so there could be no dynasty. He died mourned by the Senate, despite their fear of his temper. To summarize his rule, we must first describe the actions of his immediate successor (quoted only by the Augustan Histories). The next emperor, Tacitus (himself a senator), proposed that Aurelian be deified. ‘O Senators, I could justly prosecute even the gods, who have allowed such an emperor to perish, unless strongly they preferred him to be with themselves. Therefore I propose divine honours ...’ The request was at once granted by the Senate. Tacitus then proposed that a golden statue of Aurelian be placed on the Capitol, and silver statues in the Senate House, in the Temple of the Sun and in Trajan’s Forum. Apparently the silver monuments were indeed erected and dedicated, but the golden statue was never set up. Further, proposed Tacitus, every man should own a painting of Aurelian. Since he was speaking in the Senate House, we must assume that he meant every senator, for it would have been a Herculean undertaking even to provide just the citizens of Rome with individual paintings.

Citing Vopiscus again, two favourite slaves had been treated as freedmen by Aurelian. They were actually freed by special vote of the Senate after his death. A certain Aurelius Festivus claimed to be Aurelian’s freedman after the death of the emperor, and wrote a book about the Egyptian pretender Firmus.

On the basis of just one inscription dedicated to Aurelian, from which his name appears to have been erased, it has been suggested that he may have been subject to a limited *damnatio memoriae* (condemnation of memory; erasure of name from monuments).⁵⁰ At least four inscriptions have erasures,⁵¹ but there is no other evidence from the ancient literature and, as we have seen, Aurelian was swiftly deified in accordance with the Senate’s wishes. Definite confirmation comes from several inscriptions, e.g. AE (1909) 00219 *Divo Aureliano Aug(usto)* – ‘to the divine emperor Aurelian’ (*divo* refers to his status after death). The mutilated inscriptions concerned were probably the target of contemporary louts, although the erasure of the emperor’s name from an eastern inscription where he is thought to have been named co-emperor with Zenobia is readily understandable.

The Augustan Histories and other writers describe Aurelian as ‘an emperor who was necessary rather than good’; elsewhere, that he was one of the few good emperors, but he lacked the prerequisite quality of mercy that marked out the best of their class. A later emperor,

Diocletian, who had served under Aurelian, stated that the talents of Aurelian were better suited to the command of an army than to the government of an empire. Aurelius Victor claims that the emperor had enjoyed 'exceptional popularity and prestige in the army' and that the announcement of his murder 'resulted with destruction to the instigators, with fear to the dishonest, with doubts to their imitators, with regret to each excellent man, to no one arrogance or ostentation'. Eutropius opines that Aurelian was made a god 'deservedly'. He had 'improved military discipline and lax morals'. The *Epitome of Caesars* compares Aurelian with Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Francis Bacon (1561–1626), reviewing and classifying great imperial rulers of past ages, added Aurelian to that group who had restored boundaries or freed lands from enslavement.⁵² The only other Roman emperors in his short sub-list were Augustus and Vespasian. Gibbon declares that he died 'regretted by the army, detested by the Senate but universally acknowledged as a warlike and fortunate prince, the useful though severe reformer of a degenerate state'.⁵³

Aurelian had certainly been popular with the army. Despite his unfortunate defeat by the Alamanni at the beginning of his reign, and the fact that his main mobile army had been in almost ceaseless action, virtually all the troops had remained loyal, and he had in person faced down one known mutiny simply by claiming his status as god's chosen one. He had refused to allow his troops to loot the cities of Tyana and Palmyra when first seized, although a similar refusal by the Gallic emperor Postumus had cost the latter his life. It seems that it was only when he tried to curtail the military exploitation of the provincials by a handful of senior officers that the latter found it necessary to dispose of him – if my reconstruction of Aurelian's death above is correct.

His coins portray some of Aurelian's titles: *RESTITUTOR EXERCITI* (Restorer of the army), *RESTITUTOR ORIENTIS*, *RESTITUTOR ORBIS*, *PACATOR ORBIS* (Pacifier of the World) and *DEO ET DOMINE NATO* (Born to be God and Lord). Aurelian's Danubian troops, the backbone of his army and of all his accomplishments, are celebrated with *Virtus Illurici*, *Genius Illur(ici)* and *Genius Pannoniae*. Vaguer military congratulations are *Concordia Militum* (With agreement of the soldiers), *Fides Militum* (Faith of the soldiers) and *Fortuna Redux* (Return of good fortune).

His military distinctions, the so-called *Cognomina Victiarum*, from inscriptions include (in alphabetical order):

ARABICUS MAX. Rare, second defeat of Palmyra 273? Or recovery of Arabia from Palmyrenes?

BRITANNICUS MAX. Rare, possibly voluntary return of Britain from Gallic–Roman Empire. Perhaps even a victory over sea pirates.

CARPICUS MAX. Defeat of Carpi tribe, 273.

DACICUS MAX. Probably second defeat of barbarians (Goths? Carpi?) in Dacia after 273.

GERMANICUS MAX. Defeat of Alamanni in 271.

GOTHICUS MAX. Defeat of Goths in 271.

PALMYRENICUS MAX. Defeat of Palmyra in 272. Only one example known.

PARTHICUS MAX. Probably defeat of Palmyra in 272. This inscription occurs very commonly. Since the defeat of Palmyra is widely attested, it seems appropriate to assume that this title alludes to Palmyra. Aurelian's claimed success against Persia is scarcely mentioned by contemporary writers. However, the Persians and Parthians are widely conflated in the ancient literature, and therefore perhaps the emperor was more proud of his achievement against the Persians than its extent warranted. To complicate matters further, Aurelian never claimed any victory title over the Gallic Empire after he had conquered it, and might not have felt inclined to do the same for his victory over Palmyra. The Gallic Romans were regarded as wayward children, while Zenobia's government was considered to be an enemy, so probably he would want a victory title, and we have too the single example of *Palmyrenicus Max*. See also the entry following:

PERSICUS MAX. On coin: Defeat of, or successful negotiations with, Persia, 272. On inscriptions, appears always to be a substitute for *Parthicus Max*. Two successor emperors (Probus, Carus) were described on inscriptions and in papyri as *Persicus Max*., which certainly was not a substitute for *Parthicus Max*. Sometimes, they appear instead as *Parthicus Max*.

SARMATICUS MAX. Possibly defeat of Vandals in 271. Only the unreliable Augustan Histories confer this title. For a long time, the sole evidence from an inscription was that provided from a well-worn stone at Sadak (modern Sadagh in eastern Turkey), discovered in 1868 and from which little can now be read. After addressing Aurelian as emperor, the partial inscription 'ARMA' appeared in the position expected for the victory title *sARMaticus max*. No surrounding letters could be read, and this assignment has been disputed in recent years.

In 1925 another worn inscription was discovered in Solin (modern Salona) in Dalmatia.⁵⁴ This reads: *sarMATICo maximo 3 / 3 daCICO MAXImo 3 / 3 co(n)s(ul)i III P(ATRI) P(ATRIAE) PROco(n)s(uli) ...* where the items in lower case are missing from the inscription, but filled in by analogy from elsewhere; the slashes ‘/’ denote a new line on the original monument; and the letters enclosed within () are extra letters to fill out the original common Latin abbreviations. The Arabic numbers ‘3’ denote the number of letters that are unreadable and cannot be guessed. This reconstruction looks very plausible, since few emperors claimed to be *Dacicus Maximus*, *Sarmaticus Maximus* fits the monument nicely, and the *III P P* are characteristic for Aurelian. Indeed, if the text has been reconstructed accurately, the inscription can be dated to 275 (Aurelian consul for the third time). Nevertheless, the absence of this title on other, better preserved inscriptions dedicated to Aurelian implies that it was an unofficial title added by an overenthusiastic devotee.

The Augustan Histories also award the titles of *Adiabenicus Max.* and *Armeniacus Max.*, but these titles have yet to be confirmed from inscriptions. However, Vaballathus, whose name appears with Aurelian on some coins, was entitled both *Adiabenicus Max.* and *Armeniacus Max.*, which might explain the error.

The four most common victory titles, and the only ones found in Egypt, are *Germanicus Max.*, *Gothicus Max.*, *Parthicus Max.* (or variant) and *Carpicus Max.*

Other civil or flattering distinctions from his inscriptions include:

DOMINO NOSTRO (Our Lord)

GLORIOSISSIMUS, PERPETUUS VICTORIOSISSIMUS
INDULGENTISSIMUS (the most glorious, perpetually the most victorious and the most indulgent to others)

INVICTO PIO (Invincible and pious)

PACATOR ORBIS (Pacifier of the World)

PATRI PATRIAE (Father of the Fatherland)

PIUS FELIX (Pious and fortunate)

PONTIFICUS MAX. (Chief Priest)

RECUPERATA REPUBLICA (The Commonwealth restored)

REPARATOR, CONSERVATOR PATRIAE (Repairer, Preserver of the Fatherland)

RESTITUTOR SAECULI (Restorer of our times)

RESTITUTOR GALLIARUM, LIBERTATIS (Restorer of Gaul, or of liberty in Gaul)

TRIBUNICIA POTESTATE (Tribunary Power)

VIRTUS AUGUSTI (Virtue of Augustus/the emperor).

Inscriptions after death: *DEO AURELIANO* (to the god Aurelian).

Particularly interesting are thirty Roman milestones found in the west of the Roman province of Africa, to the south and west of Carthage.⁵⁵ These can be dated to 274–275; that is, after Aurelian's reunification of the empire, and Aurelian is addressed systematically as *Perpetuus Imperator* (continuous or universal conqueror). These stones represent the first description of an emperor in such manner, although the title became popular with succeeding emperors. The stones also celebrate Aurelian as Restorer of the World, invincible, most victorious, most glorious and most indulgent to others. His military victories, such as *Germanicus Max.*, are barely mentioned. It was a time to celebrate peace.

The lack of good written evidence that has survived to the modern era makes it difficult to judge Aurelian's temper or temperament, but the near-contemporary accounts are hardly likely to be seriously in error. Eusebius preserved in Greek the later Christian emperor Constantine's 'Oration to the Gathering of the Saints' (c. 326) in which the earlier imperial persecutors of the Church were castigated. Aurelian is described, by Constantine, as 'the savage perpetrator of every wrongdoing. How marked was your fall when, in the middle of your unrestrained career, you were cut down on the highway in Thrace and filled the ruts of the road with your impious blood!'⁵⁶

There remains also a description by the pagan emperor Julian (361–363) of the 'Banquet of the Caesars', a fantasy in which he imagined the deified Roman emperors arriving as dinner guests at the hall of the ancient gods.⁵⁷ Aurelian rushed in, fearful that he would be detained at the entrance for close examination of his 'many unjustifiable murders'. However, the Sun god Helios, who might be supposed to owe Aurelian a favour, told the other gods to excuse Aurelian on the grounds that his punishment (assassination) had fitted his crimes; therefore, according to the old Delphic oracle, 'justice has been done'. This, then, was the view prevailing of Aurelian in the 360s.

The certainty is that single-handed, if an emperor commanding many legions can be called single-handed, he restored military

discipline, crushed all his opponents, whether barbarian, Roman usurper, or alien state such as Persia and Palmyra, and reunited the two major separated parts of the empire with Rome. In the last he had, to be sure, been aided by the evident enthusiasm of the provincials for reunification with the central authority; the eastern and Gallic provinces had all welcomed Aurelian and his armies with open arms as soon as the troops of the pretenders had retired. The provincials did not want the empire to fragment; they wanted the certainty and security of the *Pax Romana* to continue. The ‘Restorer of the World’ found a world that wanted to be restored. Moreover, the Goths had been so severely handled that they remained quiet for decades.

In addition, Aurelian had tried hard to reform the currency and the economic climate of the Roman Empire, and had increased the free rations for the dispossessed population of the city of Rome. Even the official religion had been made more welcoming to the provincials. We cannot guess what further administrative reforms Aurelian might have introduced if he had survived, perhaps anticipating those of his successor Diocletian.

The restored and renewed empire would continue under his successors for a further two centuries. The judgement of posterity can be only that in Aurelian one of the great Roman superheroes, to be ranked with the Scipios, Julius Caesar or Augustus, strode upon the earth.

St Valentine and other martyrs⁵⁸

One of those perhaps martyred during Aurelian’s rule was the bishop of Interamna Nahars (modern Terni), a large town 63 miles (101.4 kilometres) north of Rome on the Flaminian Way. Famous for his piety and charity, and known as a worker of miracles, the bishop, Valentinus, was invited to Rome to heal a sick child. He effected the cure and converted several of the local residents to Christianity, including one Abondius, son of a city prefect named as ‘Placidus’. Placidus ordered the arrest of Valentinus and, when he refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods, Valentinus was beheaded, then buried on the outskirts of Interamna Nahars. The date of the execution was 14 February.

We know that Furius Placidus was prefect of Rome in 273, in the middle of Aurelian’s rule and therefore before the emperor had initiated any persecution of Christians. However, the events narrated may relate to a somewhat later date when Placidus might be described

as ex-city prefect. It was the custom to refer to an ex-magistrate in later years by his highest previous title, and thus the death of Valentinus occurred more probably during the last great persecution (303–311) of the Christians under the emperors Diocletian and Galerius. The story was recorded by Jerome (Hieronymous) towards the end of the fourth century, apparently from information in existing Roman calendars. Thus began the legend of Valentine, patron saint of lovers. The traditions that justify his patronage are few in number and concern children as much as the amorous.

There are stories of several martyrs in Gaul during Aurelian's reign. The French historian Homo⁵⁹ dismisses these claims outright, and it seems very probable that the accounts can be attributed to: 1. Confusion with the vicious anti-Christian pogroms under the later emperors Diocletian and Galerius; 2. Confusion between (governors of) the emperor Aurelian and the much earlier, but similarly named Marcus Aurelius; 3. Invention, to beguile the credulous. In one example, the holy Patrocles of Gaul is summoned by Aurelian, who offers him great wealth if he will but sacrifice to 'idols'. There then follows a question-and-answer session that leads to Patrocles being sentenced to death. A miracle enables Patrocles to escape from the soldiers by walking across the river Seine, but he is found and executed the same day. There is no recorded and attestable example of any Christians being paid to renounce their faith by the Roman authorities.

Chapter Eight

Interregnum and Probus

Interregnum¹

The Roman Empire might have been restored, but it was still fragile. The premature death of Aurelian had removed his iron grip, which had so terrified the barbarians, and they began to consider fresh plans to plunder the increasingly prosperous provinces. A new emperor would have his hands full, consolidating his predecessor's achievements.

When Gallienus had been assassinated in 268, the conspirators had already arranged for a successor, Claudius, to take immediate charge. The murder of Aurelian had occurred unexpectedly, and no one had given a thought to the succession. Aurelian lacked a son who might have enabled an obvious dynastic choice to be made, while the most plausible successor generals, such as Probus, were loyally at their stations on the Rhine, the Euphrates or other remote frontiers. While there was no emperor a period called an *Interregnum* was declared, hitherto known only once in imperial times, after the murder of the hated emperor Domitian in 96, but really a throwback to the days of the Roman Republic. The *Interregnum* (literally, 'between rulers') defined a period when the Senate ruled, usually in circumstances in which the Republic's two annual consuls had both died in office.

The existence of the *Interregnum*, attested by four Latin historians, is confirmed by coinage issued at the time. However, these, and the evidence of papyri, also suggest that the period of rule by the Senate probably did not exceed eight to ten weeks, although the Latin writers suggest six to eight months. It is likely that the two-month interval was the minimum required to assemble the views of the far-flung Roman generals about the successor, and that other delays evidenced by coinage and papyri simply reflect the time taken for news to reach distant mints and scribes; in other words, that there was no real period of senatorial control except by default. Now that he was safely dead, the Senate was quite happy to praise the fallen emperor, and Severina, his widow, was acknowledged as empress at Alexandria with her own coins for months after Aurelian's death, according to the evidence of the coins themselves.² There were virtually no changes in the Roman governors during the *Interregnum*.

Some coins are known from the third century that bear the legend 'The *Genius* of the Roman People' on one side, and on the reverse the motif *Int Urb*. These coins were for a long time believed to be the product of the post-Aurelian *Interregnum*, since the motif was understood to be an abbreviation for *Interregnum Urbis* – the *Interregnum* of/at Rome. In recent years it has become clear that these coins date to the time of the emperor Gallienus – it turns out that it is his face that represents 'The *Genius* of the Roman People'! – and *Int Urb* probably commemorates a ceremonial entrance into Rome, with the meaning *Intrata Urbe* ('having entered the City') or *Introitus Urbis* ('the entry of the City').

Considering the instability of the time, a strong ruler was needed urgently. So shocked was the majority of the Roman army by the murderous action of a handful of its officers that the legionaries invited the disbelieving Senate to select its own candidate as emperor. Considering that the Senate had long had its wishes ignored, and knowing that any appointment that it made was likely to be overthrown by the army, the senators cautiously passed the buck back to the legions. Again the Senate was consulted by the army and finally the senators decided to acclaim one of their own number, an eminent 75-year-old Italian, M. Claudius Tacitus, whose principal reputation was that he claimed to be a descendant of the illustrious first/second-century historian of the same name. The present Tacitus was probably the senator who had been made consul in 273 by Aurelian, consistent with the late emperor's policy of veneration of worthy members of the Senate. The story (known only from the Augustan Histories) goes that Tacitus had retired to his villa in Campania when he learned that he was for the hot seat, but was recalled by the Senate on some pretext and virtually shouted into power by the acclamations of the other senators. The army accepted the choice in November or December 275, according to papyri.

Modern historians have doubted whether Tacitus was quite the blameless old man that the accounts describe. It has been suggested that he was another Danubian general, perhaps retired, and probably a lot younger than seventy-five years, as would be appropriate for the emergencies of the age. He might have been an army contemporary of Aurelian, who was sixty-one when he was murdered. However, the coins of Tacitus certainly appear to depict an elderly statesman. The Greek writers Zosimus and Zonaras also agree that Tacitus was appointed by the army, not by the Senate. The ancient descriptions of

Tacitus as 'a kind man' with 'outstanding morals' may well be correct.

The first actions of Tacitus were to deify Aurelian and to make arrangements for the commemoration of the late emperor with statues and other monuments. A curious enactment of Tacitus is recorded in the Augustan Histories: it became a capital offence to manufacture certain alloys of precious metals. This presumably relates to further difficulties with the coinage or even with superior grade forgeries. As it turns out, Tacitus would be the last emperor to allow coins specific to provinces, with the notable exception of those from Alexandria, which endured for a further two decades.³ The provincial mints survived, but would now issue the regular coins produced at every mint. Then he hastened to the armies in Thrace to wreak vengeance on Aurelian's assassins who, we learn, were tortured to death 'good and bad alike' with special treatment for Mucapor, the assassin who struck the blow. Some appear to have escaped, as we learn that the next emperor, Probus, also took action against the surviving murderers of Aurelian. Then it was time to deal with new barbarian inroads.

The appointment of Tacitus may have been hastened by alarming reports from the Rhine that Franks, Alamanni, Lugii and other tribesmen had breached the defences of Gaul, no doubt in the hope of profiting from the confusion after Aurelian's death. The raiders seized some sixty towns that lacked walls, and wrecked the province's prosperity, but most cities in Gaul now had fortifications capable of repelling sudden barbarian invasions. We may suppose, though, that many of the province's inhabitants would have yearned for the return of a new Postumus.

More serious were the reports of disturbances by the Heruli tribesmen who had poured out of the Sea of Azov in 275–276. These barbarians claimed that they had been recruited by Aurelian to aid the latter's campaign against Persia. When they arrived – no Aurelian and no pay; so, being less-than-noble savages, they decided to plunder instead the assembly area, the province of Pontus in Asia Minor. They overran many cities and some had reached as far south as Cilicia. Tacitus and his legions were conveniently close; when they arrived in Asia Minor the emperor was able to buy off many of the marauders simply by paying them the fee agreed by Aurelian. Those who did not retire were squelched by the Romans, acting predominantly under the command of the praetorian prefect Florian (276). For this Tacitus received the title *Gothicus Maximus*.

After a reign of just six months, Tacitus died in 276 at Tyana in the eastern province of Cappadocia, probably in June according to the evidence of papyri. The accounts of his death are contradictory. He may have died of natural causes or a fever; perhaps it was true that he was already seventy-five years old. Alternatively, he may have been murdered, possibly by assassins who had already killed a relative whom Tacitus had appointed governor of Syria, and who may have feared his retaliation. The Greek sources claim that the murderers of the governor, fearing Tacitus' revenge, allied themselves with the surviving assassins of Aurelian and together they killed Tacitus. Zosimus and Cedrenus even claim that Florian urged them to the deed. Cedrenus additionally claims a two-year reign for Tacitus, implying a confusion with the emperor Claudius II, perhaps caused by the similarity of the Gothic invasions that each faced. Whatever the circumstances, Tacitus died lamented by the Senate, although he had not restored their military commands – and once again there was no prearranged plan for a successor. An unusual feature of the reign of Tacitus, which casts doubt on the idea that he was an appointee of the Senate, is that after death he was not deified. On the other hand, his name was not erased from monuments either. A puzzling combination. Some modern historians have suggested that the so-called *Interregnum*, of several months after the death of Aurelian, really describes the six-month rule of Tacitus, explained by an original, unknown source as an *Interregnum* between Aurelian and Probus (below), and that the other sources just blindly copied the original writer.

Tacitus' praetorian prefect Florian, perhaps also his brother or half-brother, present in Cappadocia with the late emperor, assumed the title of emperor, although without seeking the permission of the Senate. He was, however, recognized by that body and coins show that his rule was accepted by Europe and Africa. Florian then finished off the war against the Heruli.

However, Florian faced a formidable opponent in the east. Aurelian's old general Probus had been appointed commander of the Roman East by Tacitus and was supported by all his legions. Probus must have seen no reason to recognize Florian, who had simply appointed himself emperor, and Probus was himself invested with the purple by his own troops in about June 276. Florian had to retire to Cilicia when he learned of this news, and the two armies confronted each other at Tarsus. Probus was probably the better general and would certainly have possessed the superior reputation with both

armies. He manoeuvred his eastern-trained troops around until those of Florian, who had mostly been recruited from Europe, and were equally heavily armoured, wilted in the heat of the Middle Eastern sun. The western soldiers then rebelled against Florian and surrendered with very little bloodshed. Florian himself may have been murdered by his own men, as a preliminary to the surrender, or may have been seized by Probus' troops, held while they sought their emperor's decision and then killed by his former soldiers after Probus had given the command. This left Probus as sole emperor (September 276).

Probus the Upright (276–282)

Marcus Aurelius Equitius Probus was born on 19 August⁴ in about 232⁵ at Sirmium in Lower Pannonia, and was therefore another Danubian. (Vagi⁶ points out that as emperor he minted many coins for the town of Siscia. Such commemoration of Siscia was very rare under other emperors, and therefore it is possible that Siscia was his real town of birth.) His father may have been the farmer of a smallholding or a military officer. The Augustan Histories describe his earlier career: as tribune he had crossed the Danube during the 'Sarmatian War' and was rewarded for his exploits. The emperor Valerian appointed him as the first young commander of the Third Legion, 'The Fortunate', although no such legion is known to have existed. Gallienus made Probus commander of the armies in Illyricum. Under Aurelian, Probus became commander of the Tenth Legion ('the Bravest of his Army'); again, this statement is probably inaccurate. We know from other sources that Probus had certainly been favoured by Aurelian, who put him in charge of armies first in Egypt, where he defeated Zenobia's intrusion, and then on the Rhine. It is likely that his appointment to the command of the east had been made by Aurelian, to whom he was always a valuable lieutenant. Probus, we are told, dissuaded Aurelian from some of his cruelties. Finally, Tacitus appointed Probus as military commander of the entire Eastern Command.

While the precise accuracy of some of these statements is dubious, there is no doubt that it reflects an illustrious career. Probus had evidently acquired an excellent reputation as a Roman army general – more importantly, perhaps, as a loyal Roman army general. Probus was also highly regarded by his soldiers, especially since he retained little of their plunder for himself.

When Tacitus died unexpectedly, there was surely much discussion

among the soldiers about his likely successor. 'What we want,' shouted one of Probus' officers, 'is an emperor who will be strong, just, modest, merciful and upright [probus].' At once the superstitious troops assembled together observed the omen and took up the cry: 'We want Probus!' Their general duly allowed himself to be invested with the purple. He claimed to be the former emperor's appointed successor, rather than Florian. The truth of this claim is unknown.

After the defeat and death of Florian, the Senate was happy to accept Probus as the new emperor in late 276. Probus in turn was careful always to show the Senate proper respect or, at least, a show of proper respect, a policy that was not only wise but also endeared him to later Latin historians. He took his first consulship in the year 277. According to Zosimus, Probus finally settled accounts with those assassins of Aurelian still surviving by the dubious expedient of inviting them all to a banquet and then retiring to an upstairs room from which he gave the signal for guards to storm in and massacre the banqueters. If this story is true, then the conspiracy against Aurelian must have been better organized than otherwise supposed, or there were a very large number of names on Aurelian's alleged death list. It seems strange, too, that those meeting at the banquet could not recognize one another and thereby receive a premonition of the doom awaiting them. The same source claims that Probus also avenged himself against the killers of Tacitus, but pardoned all the former supporters of Florian. Zonaras and the Augustan Histories confirm that Probus rounded up the assassins of both Aurelian and Tacitus in disgrace, and then killed them all. We may assume that the new imperial ruler felt it prudent to set a severe example to those who murdered incumbent emperors.

It seems likely that Probus continued to mop up any of the barbarians still in Asia Minor after the attentions of Tacitus and Florian. He was awarded the title of *Gothicus Maximus* in 277. Now that he was in command of the whole empire, Probus lost no time in marshalling a vast army and leading it against the Franks and Alamanni in Gaul, whom Tacitus had been forced to ignore while he acted against the invaders in Asia Minor. Gaul had been devastated and was still in turmoil with parties of barbarians plundering as they pleased and with numerous towns fallen to them. The intruders were withdrawing laden with their loot, but Probus sent his generals and his legions off in hot pursuit (277–278).

The destruction wrought by the barbarians had ensured that there

was little food to be found for citizens, invaders and legions alike. Yet in the midst of famine Probus enjoyed a miracle. A whirlwind pulled down rain and grain – and the latter was found to be wholly edible after cooking into loaves. The latest incursions by the Franks were checked and the Romans captured Semno, the chief of the Lugii, and his son after a campaign lasting about a year. The Franks were permitted to depart freely once they had released their captives and plunder. Probus personally commanded the legions that crushed the Alamanni and he introduced a general system of reward in Gaul: one gold coin, an *aureus*, for every barbarian head brought in.

Meanwhile, other German tribesmen, Burgundians and Vandals, poured through Raetia to the aid of the Franks in huge numbers, much larger than the forces that Probus could muster. The emperor manoeuvred skilfully. With both sides facing each other across a river, the Roman legions provoked the barbarians to cross over in small detachments, each of which was destroyed one after another. The large remnant sued for peace and offered to return their plunder in order to recover those captives that the Romans now held. However, the tribesmen then failed to return their own prisoners to the Romans, and an outraged Probus attacked and utterly crushed them during their retreat with a pitched battle that resulted in the submission of nine enemy chieftains and their leader Igillus, the taking of barbarian hostages and the grant of 16,000 German soldiers absorbed into the Roman army. For obvious reasons, the latter were dispersed well away from the Rhine. Probus commented, ‘The Roman [people] is pleased to be using, not seeing, barbarian auxiliary troops.’

Probus had now restored all the Rhine and upper Danube, for which the emperor was granted the title *Germanicus Maximus*. He and his generals had expelled the Franks from northern Gaul, the Alamanni from central Gaul and the Burgundians and Vandals from Raetia and Illyricum. After remarkable successes in battle, the restoration of Gaul was probably Probus’ finest single achievement. The emperor followed up his success with the creation of new forts east of the Rhine, probably as part of a tripwire system against new barbarian attacks. He advanced as far as the river Elbe and planned to follow up his successes with the conquest of all Germany but, as the Augustan Histories inform us correctly, ‘the time was not ripe.’

Vandals or Sarmatians again invaded Illyricum in 278. Probus crushed that attack and recovered stolen property, earning the title *Restitutor Illyrici*. Some of the new invaders were settled in Britain. As

Probus and his legions continued their march into Thrace, their reputation alone was sufficient to frighten the Getae tribe into submission.

Probus in the east

Aurelian had left unfinished business with Persia. It may be recalled that he had planned to accompany a large army on a punitive expedition to deal with the Sassanid monarchy, and perhaps to recover the lost Roman province of Mesopotamia. It is unclear who occupied the province at this time. Tacitus and Probus had so far been too preoccupied with barbarian invasions to continue where Aurelian had left off, but the time now seemed to be right to make another attempt. In 279, then, Probus and his legions marched off towards the east, where, to complicate matters, a usurper had arisen.

The story of the usurper in these turbulent times illustrates the circumstances that forced their hands. Saturninus, a Moor who had been placed in command of the eastern frontier (*Dux Limitis Orientalis*) by Aurelian according to the Augustan Histories, and one-time close friend of Probus, was at this time the governor of Syria with, apparently, influence in Egypt. After a riot had occurred in that sensitive corn-producing province, he was proclaimed emperor at Antioch in Syria in about 278 by his own troops and was also acknowledged by Egypt. Saturninus took up the purple reasoning that, whatever happened, his life was probably forfeit. As the formidable Probus and his huge armies, the legions of an empire, approached, the mutineers belatedly recognized their folly and promptly murdered their own appointee. Saturninus had barely the time to release a handful of coins proclaiming him as emperor.

Another problem was that a community of brigands had installed itself in a mountain fortress, the town of Cremna, north of Lycia, within the region of Isauria in southern Asia Minor. Again, Zosimus gives us the details. The brigand leader Lydius, who had been robbing the provinces of Pamphylia and Lycia, withdrew to Cremna as Probus approached. The Romans set up a siege, and Lydius was forced to raze buildings in the centre of his walled town to make space for crops in order to feed the population. Still there were too many inhabitants, so their leader ejected all those whom he deemed to be useless. The Romans promptly herded them back into Cremna, whereupon Lydius simply threw them off the city walls out into the surrounding precipices. Then he made a tunnel, so as to make sorties for food, but the besiegers discovered it and blocked it up. Now Lydius tried to eke

out his supplies by giving orders to kill all those not necessary for his survival. Unsurprisingly, this was not well received by the brigands remaining and one of his own highly skilled archers defected to the Romans. Knowing the habits of his leader, he was able to arrange with his new allies that they provide him with one of the deadly Roman long-range, arrow-discharging machines, a Scorpion. Then he shot Lydius. The murderous bandit died, telling his remaining supporters never to surrender, but they gave up shortly after. Thus Isauria was freed from one of its worst predators (279). Probus made sure by settling some of his veterans at a new colony in the area. The Augustan Histories tell us that Probus dealt with an Isaurian brigand leader, Palfuerius, who may or may not be identified with Lydius.

Cremna lies now in ruins,⁷ but the Roman siege works (comprising two walls, an outer and an inner) are still visible, together with a huge mound from which artillery could fire down. Stone projectiles of up to 55 pounds (25 kilograms) are scattered within the city. A small counter-mound from the fort represents an attempt at defence. The walls were not breached; Cremna surrendered, as Zosimus states.

Still Probus marched east towards Syria. A further distraction was an invasion of southern Egypt by the Blemmyes tribesmen, resurgent after suppression by Aurelian, and a revolt by the town of Ptolemais on the Nile, deep within Egypt, but Probus' local governor was able to contain them. The emperor himself reached Antioch in Syria in 280.

With these difficulties all along his march, Probus seems to have lost enthusiasm for a war with the militarily powerful Persian kingdom. However, the Persians, too, were in disarray. Their unspeakable king Shapur had died and been replaced finally after several civil wars by Bahram II. While the new monarch tried to consolidate his power, it was possible for an uncertain emperor to create a favourable truce. This was arranged, and the emperor hurried back to Europe, no doubt fearing what he might find there.

Despite oft-stated claims that Probus was awarded the victory title of *Persicus Maximus* for his truce, supposedly on the evidence of coins, it is in fact very difficult to validate the truth of such a claim. Neither *Persicus Maximus* nor *Parthicus Maximus* (nor their inflected forms) appear in any of the Latin inscriptions for Probus stored at the Frankfurt database of electronic inscriptions. Similarly, Mattingly's famous coin catalogue contains no coin for Probus that claims a triumph over the Persians, and the author's search through the offerings of a selection of prominent dealers in ancient coins again

found no example.

In fact, the only evidence that Probus ever claimed such a title appears to lie in a single papyrus⁸ concerning a land lease near Oxyrhynchus. The papyrus can be dated between 28 September and 27 October 282, and Probus (the eighth Egyptian year of his reign being used to date the document) is described as *Gothicus Maximus Persicus Maximus Pius Felix Augustus*. The scribe might have made an error.

Revolt in Gaul

Probus' fears were realized. In his absence there had arisen two mutinies. Bonosus, one-time commander of the Roman fleet on the Rhine, had previously been relieved of his command by Probus after he had allowed some barbarians to burn his boats. Bonosus had seized the chance to proclaim himself emperor (280) while Probus was in the east. In the same year Proculus was acclaimed at Colonia Agrippinensium (Cologne) as another emperor by the troops on the Rhine. He appears to have had plans to set up another breakaway Gallic–Roman empire claiming Britain, Gaul and Spain. The governor of Britain also rebelled. It is possible that severe disturbances had continued in Gaul even after Probus had departed, caused by a ruined economy, barbarians and a general breakdown of law and order. The result was that local solutions were being sought by the citizens and army, and Proculus is credited by the Augustan Histories with having defeated a fresh incursion by the Alamanni.

As Probus and his army passed back through Thrace, some 100,000 Basternae tribesmen, loyal to Rome and perhaps fleeing from barbarian pressure behind, were settled within the Roman frontier near the mouth of the Danube or in Thrace. Many Franks were also settled, but once Probus had departed the Franks began to build ships and then plunder the coasts of Greece, Sicily and northern Africa before returning home with few casualties.

As had been the case with the pretender Saturninus, both rebel usurpers found their support evaporating as the real emperor drew close. One died by betrayal, another by suicide and there were only skirmishes with Probus' legions. The rebellion in Britain was quashed by Victorinus, one of Probus' generals, who had recommended the rebel for his post and gladly seized the opportunity to make amends.

The emperor enjoyed a magnificent Triumph in Rome towards the end of 281, noted for the numbers and varieties of conquered peoples represented in it. The highlight was a spectacular hunt for wild beasts

in an artificial forest created in the Circus, when the spectators were allowed to plunge in and grab what they wanted from ostriches, stags, boars, deer, sheep and other animals. Three hundred gladiators, taken from barbarian prisoners, fought to the death and it must have been at about this time that eighty gladiators conspired to break out. They killed their guards, set off on a trail of robbery during which they were joined by other fugitives, and were finally rounded up by soldiers sent after them.

Probus had proved to be as successful and energetic as his mentor Aurelian. However, there was economic dislocation everywhere, and a sign of the times was that the great city of Athens reconstructed its walls in 280 well within the earlier perimeter, and using rubble from the older, larger wall that had been wrecked by the barbarian invasions of 267–268. Indeed, archaeology shows that most of the walls that now surrounded Roman towns were built during the reign of Probus, presumably at his urging. Aurelian's huge wall surrounding Rome was also completed.

With peace at last to hand Probus might perhaps have tried to improve on the economic reforms of his illustrious predecessor, but he had not seized any real wealth as the majority of his victims had been barbarians. Further, such gold as he had managed to confiscate had largely been spent on his costly Triumph. Probus continued to issue the reformed coinage of Aurelian, and his coins attest the fact that, like his predecessor, the new emperor was a Sun worshipper. To replenish the imperial treasury significantly, he would need to overcome the Persians.

A sign of the emperor's insecurity may be revealed in the number of consulships he took for himself. Out of six successive years when he might have been consul, years 277 to 282 inclusive, he was consul five times. Probus also tried to encourage viticulture by easing some protectionist laws dating back more than 180 years, to the emperor Domitian, concerning the extent and growing of vineyards outside Italy. Aurelian had previously promoted similar reforms within Italy. The net result was to raise prosperity in many regions capable of growing the grape, especially in Gaul and the Balkans. Jerome, for example, attributes to Probus in 280 two hilly vineyards near Sirmium and in Moesia, planted by the army and harvested by the local provincials.

The emperor also deployed troops in Egypt to build bridges, drain swampland and create grain fields and new farms around the region of

the Nile. Archaeology has confirmed these works, known otherwise only from the unreliable Augustan Histories, and apparently the output of grain from Egypt increased markedly. This must have been of huge benefit to the remainder of the empire, but the troops doubtless resented such inappropriate activity.

Probus set about assembling another army to tackle Persia in 282, either for the simple purpose of recovering Mesopotamia or for the broader economic reason speculated above. However, the armies rebelled.

The reason for the outbreak of fresh mutinies among the army in 282 is not entirely clear. Some modern historians have conjectured that the underlying problem was that the armies had fought too hard for too long. As a typical army term was twenty years, some of the troops must have been in almost continuous service for Aurelian and Probus in repelling interminable hordes of barbarians, restoring the empire and on the verge, at least, of several bloody civil wars. Moreover, deaths among the general population caused by the terrible and persistent plague, or by barbarian incursions, must have reduced the number of potential army recruits, requiring existing soldiers to serve for longer terms. The Latin writers give an entirely different explanation. Probus was a stern disciplinarian who would never allow the soldiers to be idle, as he feared that that was when they dreamed of rebellion. He put one of his armies to work on another grand land reclamation project near his home town, Sirmium, in Pannonia, a thankless task that would earn the soldiers none of the booty that they sought from successful battles; a strange task, too, if the army was on its way to fight in Persia. When he made a speech to the effect that soon he hoped that there would be no more need for soldiers, it was the last straw.

The army in Raetia, close to Pannonia, rebelled and put up its commander, Carus, as the new emperor in about August 282. When Probus sent a detachment of his troops to suppress the rebellion, they deserted to join Carus. Shortly afterwards, the soldiers working on the land reclamation project rioted and chased the luckless Probus into a large, iron watchtower. The soldiers burst in and killed him (September 282).

Such was the end of one of Rome's finest generals, who had also made an outstanding emperor. There is a little mystery about the date of his death, as a salutation in a recently discovered papyrus suggests that he enjoyed an eighth year. The years of his reign are traditionally

stated as 276–282 (seven years), and the ‘eighth’ year might be due simply to a clerical error on the part of the scribe. The succeeding Roman writers made little attempt to disguise the panegyrical nature of their accounts of his reign, but even a modern historian may admit that, if it had required an Aurelian to restore the empire, it had taken a Probus to defend it against the barbarians. The emperor Julian⁹ reckoned that Probus had recovered no fewer than seventy cities and summarized him as a good administrator who failed to handle the legions with sufficient tact. Probus was described by Victor as a ‘second Hannibal’. He possessed great knowledge of warfare, trained recruits well and, like Hannibal, used idle soldiers to plant vineyards. Eutropius claimed that the emperor was an ardent, energetic and fair ruler, the equal of Aurelian in military skills and the superior by virtue of his gracious nature. Zosimus describes Probus as ‘brilliant and just’ shortly before a gap appears in the surviving text.

He was certainly overworked. Only four of his legal rescripts survived from his six to seven years of rule to be incorporated into Justinian’s codex, and he had to set up a new court, the *judicium magnum*, to hear financial appeals. The court was described explicitly as ‘in place of Caesar, without appeal’.¹⁰

The modern view is that Probus made a severe error in accelerating the settlement of huge numbers of barbarians within the Roman frontiers. Some of them had promptly rioted. Inscriptions confirm that Probus was deified, although the written evidence is patchy, and his relations with the Senate at Rome may not have been as cosy as his panegyrists suggest. Fourteen senators were ambiguously *missos*¹¹ after an uprising in the Circus Maximus (the word may mean ‘dismissed’ or ‘put to death’) and the Augustan Histories express doubt about his deification. His salutation, like that of Aurelian himself, as *Restitutor Orbis* had been well deserved. Other hopes expressed on his coinage such as *Concordia Militum* (with the agreement of the soldiers) and *Felicia Tempora* (felicitous times) remained only dreams.

Carus and sons (282–285)

Carus was Probus’ praetorian prefect and, in an age that relied heavily on Danubian generals, probably came originally from Narbo in Gaul. He always claimed to have played no part in the murder of Probus – whom he had deified at once, and he punished the assassins – and protested also, like several others, that he had not sought the purple. As with earlier praetorian prefects, he may well have had legal training and certainly the edicts that he decreed showed a concern for

legal niceties. However, he broke with tradition, in a manner that raised eyebrows, by not seeking ratification from the Senate for his appointment as emperor. This had always been a formality anyway, but Carus dispensed even with that token pretence by announcing curtly to the Senate through a letter: 'I am emperor.' The Senate accepted the decision.

Like so many of his predecessors Probus had died without sons, leaving the question of succession wide open again. Carus not only possessed two sons, Carinus and Numerian, but both were old enough already to play an active role in command of the empire. This would be certain to create difficulties for any new pretender to the throne – not only would he have to overthrow Carus, but he would have to deal with the sons too.

Carus' first task was to initiate himself with the blood of barbarians. Knowledge of the death of Probus may have provided the opportunity for which the barbarians had been waiting. Once again, there had been an invasion into Pannonia from across the Danube, this time by Quadi and Sarmatian tribesmen. Luckily, his own army and the former legions of Probus were conveniently to hand, and the incursion was smashed with 16,000 tribesmen counted dead and 20,000, of both sexes, captured. Coin inscriptions confirm the victory. It appears that the tribal migration had been motivated by a search for new lands, if whole families were in movement.

Now, at last, it might be possible to implement the grand strategy of Aurelian and Probus for a war with Persia. Carus began by taking the precaution of guarding his rear with the appointment of his elder son Carinus as governor of the western empire. Any usurper here would have to contend with Carus' deputy, whose loyalty need not be questioned. We may remark, in passing, how unfortunate Aurelian and Probus had been never to have been able to rely on a similar lieutenant when they set out on their remote campaigns. Carus and his younger son Numerian departed together with the bulk of the Roman armies for the east.

Persia was still suffering from internal dissensions within her monarchy. Three different kings, Hormizd, Bahram I and Bahram II, had come and gone since the death of the infamous Shapur, while civil war had broken out in 282 between Bahram III (276–293) and Narses, who was Shapur's last surviving son and the Sassanid king of Armenia. It was at this opportune moment that Carus struck the Persians and he was able to recover the lost Roman province of

Mesopotamia, achieving a victory over the Persians in 283 and even capturing their cities of Coche and Ctesiphon on opposite banks of the river Tigris. At long, long last the Roman Empire had been restored to the extent bequeathed to it by Septimius Severus in 211, if we overlook the voluntary abandonment of Dacia by Aurelian and the uncertain status of the Agri Decumates at this time. Carus received the title of *Persicus Maximus*.

Carus had intended to penetrate deeper into Persian territory, although oracles consulted previously had informed him that he would be allowed to reach Ctesiphon after his victory, but could go no further. He was still with his army, although ill, when a violent thunderstorm overtook the camp. His body was found in the emperor's tent after a flash of lightning. Apparently he had been struck by the bolt from the heavens and one can guess readily the mileage that the Roman soothsayers got out of this event. Suffice it to say that Numerian, who was of an unwarlike disposition although apparently a good poet, suffered a minor defeat at the hands of the Persians and then chose to pack up the camp and take home the bulk of the army, excepting the necessary garrisons.

The modern suspicion is that Carus was murdered as step one of an elaborate plot to overthrow the whole dynasty. This seems unlikely; why not kill Numerian too and proclaim a revolt? However, matters were to become more complicated. Numerian was certainly alive in March 284, the date of his single rescript¹² despatched from Emesa. During the long trek back to Europe, Numerian suffered from an eye infection so that he had to be kept hidden within a tent protected from wind movements. At some point on the way home, he died (284). Aper, the praetorian prefect and also Carus' son-in-law, continued to hide the body until the stench that arose could not be disguised. The general Diocles led the investigation. It was rumoured already that Aper had been involved with the death of Carus and now he appeared to have killed Numerian, and Diocles ended an impassioned speech to the soldiers, during which he swore that he had not been involved in the death personally, by stabbing Aper, killing him. Then the army appointed Diocles as the new emperor (284), after which he changed his name to Diocletian. Diocletian claimed to have avenged Carus' son, but the name of Numerian was later erased from public monuments. Was the murder of Numerian and of an innocent Aper, who may have concealed the body simply to avert the rebellion that actually did occur until Carinus could join him, step two of

Diocletian's scheme? We shall probably never know.

Carinus had already dealt with one barbarian invasion across the Rhine and put Britain in order while his father was in the east. After news of the mutiny reached him, he marched his troops at once eastwards from Gaul across the north of Italy and into Illyricum, easily knocking over a rebel, one Julianus, en route near Verona. Julianus appears to have made his revolt in favour of Diocletian, to whom he appealed for aid. The large army of Carinus prepared to engage Diocletian's weaker forces near Margus in the province of Moesia. Carinus' personal traits of luxurious living and viciousness endeared him to few and, when it became apparent that his loyal soldiers were winning the battle with the armies returning from the east, the emperor was assassinated by one of his own officers – allegedly one whose wife Carinus had seduced. This left Diocletian as sole ruler of the Roman world (285).

Carus and his two sons had enjoyed only two full years of uninterrupted rule before dying or being challenged, yet Carus had finally finished the task that had been left incomplete by the assassinated Aurelian. An impressive result for so short a reign. Carus and Numerian would be deified by command of Carinus, son and brother. Inscriptions and coins confirm the deification of Carus; for Numerian we have only the evidence of coins.¹³ There was no convenient imperial relative to deify Carinus, and he appears not to have been so honoured. Interestingly, both sons shared the same victory titles *Germanicus Max.*, *Persicus Max.* and *Britannicus Max.* Years later, the emperor Julian felt disinclined to invite any of the three to his imaginary 'Banquet of the Caesars'.

Conclusion

Diocletian (284–305) showed his statesmanship after his victory over Carinus by an action unprecedented in previous Roman history: he offered a general amnesty to all those who had supported Carus and Carinus even to the extent of permitting them to retain their existing ranks and appointments. He also arranged for the reconstruction of the Roman Senate building that had been wrecked by a devastating fire in 283, which had destroyed much of Rome. The building that still stands in the ancient Forum at Rome is his replacement. The newly restored and consolidated Roman Empire enjoyed an almost unbroken peace, troubled only slightly by barbarian incursions that were ruthlessly suppressed and, at the end of twenty years, Diocletian performed another action unique among all the emperors of Rome: he

retired voluntarily in favour of his designated successor. After his death (probably in about 316), the Senate was proud to deify Diocletian, an act that was also unparalleled – the deification of a private citizen. We may leave the Danubian generals of the third century with the knowledge that the Roman Empire had been restored as fully as it could be.

Chapter Nine

The Legacy of the Danubian Emperors

Permanent damage caused during the third century

Notwithstanding the revulsion with which his name was held by later Roman writers, the emperor Gallienus had at least managed to prevent the complete disintegration of the Roman Empire. He had personally taken the field to withstand barbarian attacks, even though he had not been able to prevent the secession of large parts of the empire from his rule, and his reputation has been largely restored by modern historians.

Yet it had taken the actions of three super-human Danubian generals to stem the tide of anarchy, civil strife and barbarian invasions, each personally leading battle-hardened legions recruited predominantly from the Balkan areas.

Claudius had smashed the Gothic barbarians thoroughly when their ravages seemed to be unstoppable, but his premature death by plague had prevented him from following up his success.

Aurelian had similarly crushed all barbarian intruders and reunited the entire empire under his rule. He had also set in motion the economic reforms needed to restore the devastated Roman economy.

Probus, Aurelian's loyal general and later emperor in his own right, had maintained his reputation as a destroyer of barbarians while also consolidating the fragile, newly restored empire. He had in addition perhaps settled an honourable peace with Persia.

These three rulers truly deserved the title of 'Restorer of the World' (awarded formally only to Aurelian and Probus) and their actions had checked serious barbarian incursions for decades. They had fostered a climate of stability, so important for the restoration of economic confidence, creating the background in which the administrative skills of Diocletian, also a Danubian general, could flourish.

Looking back, it can be seen that the Roman army staff, many of whom were fervent Roman patriots, had decided that they had had enough of incompetent rule by those without proper military training. After watching Gallienus' inability to restore the empire, senior generals had arranged for his murder and replaced him with one of their own number, Claudius. After Claudius' premature death from plague, the army ignored his self-appointed successor, his

inexperienced brother Quintillus, and appointed Aurelian. Quintillus committed suicide.

When Aurelian was murdered by treachery, the army negotiated for at least two months for an acceptable substitute, Tacitus. Tacitus died, again against the army's wishes, and again a self-appointed family member, Florian, was deserted in favour of the talented general Probus. After the latter was murdered, the army appeared to accept the self-appointed Carus, a lawyer who dealt competently with the Persians but, after his early death, both of Carus' sons were eliminated in favour of the general Diocletian. Diocletian would attempt to ensure a proper succession of capable military appointees through the Tetrarchy system. Considering the extraordinary achievements of all the army appointees, it would appear that the army staff's decision to select the emperors was correct.

Yet even our three supermen could not undo all the damage caused by the chaos of the mid-third century.

1. Poor discipline of the Roman legions

It had become very difficult for even an Aurelian or a Probus to impose strict discipline on the troops, and the latter had lost his life in the attempt. The army was now drawn primarily from the provinces and from the barbarians, so it had little commitment to the concept of supporting Rome. Few Italians, still fewer Romans, now served with the legions. The loyalty of the troops was generally bought with large handouts.

The new emperor Diocletian would be the first of some two dozen of his predecessors – and that tally excludes pretenders to the purple – to have died of natural old age since Septimius Severus 100 years previously. Indeed, if we except the premature death from plague of Claudius in 270, and the doubtful causes of death of Tacitus, Carus and Numerian, Diocletian was the first of these two dozen not to have died violently. However, Diocletian found it necessary to make a huge increase in the size of the Roman army, perhaps by as much as 50 per cent, and this inevitably led to a fresh decline in the standard of the recruits. The Latin historian Aurelius Victor, writing in 360, showed strong antipathy towards the contemporary Roman army, which he blamed for most of the troubles of his and recent times.¹

In passing, we find that the cavalry formations formed by Gallienus had been returned to the border legions by the time of Diocletian.² In later years, Aurelian's elite light Dalmatian and Moorish cavalry no longer serve as part of the emperor's main mobile army, but have

been stationed on the Danube and Euphrates frontiers. The originator of this change is unknown. Ultimately, the Roman *clibanarii* (heavy-armoured cavalry) were a flop. The armour was far too stiff for manoeuvrability, was also far too hot for use against the similarly attired Persians, and a mass cavalry charge could be countered easily by tripping up the horses or by slashing at the animal. The unseated rider could scarcely move! The named units of *clibanarii* known to have existed at the end of the fourth century are believed to have comprised lightly armoured cavalry units only.³

2. Failure to eliminate enemies

Whenever a band of barbarians invaded, it was only rarely eliminated completely as an enemy. For example, the invasions by the Alamanni, the Juthungi, the Sarmatians/Vandals and the Goths were recurring disasters that seemed always to be contained by the most temporary of measures – frequently simply by relieving the barbarians of their booty and escorting them out of Roman territory. It was only when Aurelian carried the fight back into Gothic lands in 272 that the wars with those Goths were terminated for a generation. The difficulty was that it was always too dangerous to an emperor to permit a general to have sufficient forces for punitive actions, while the main mobile army under the emperor's direct command was forever scuttling from one crisis to another.

3. Economic crisis

The need to fund the army had caused heavy taxation and the gross debasement of the coinage, resulting in severe inflation. This phenomenon was well recognized, but little understood at the time. It left an economic legacy that would baffle even Diocletian.

The discovery in later ages of many coin hoards buried during the third century reveals the general insecurity of the times and the need to store the few old coins, with a high proportion of silver or gold, which still possessed real intrinsic value. However, hoarding tended to make everyone less well off, by restricting the free circulation of precious metals.

Even the number of costly burial inscriptions fell steeply during this period of disorder, as evidenced by surviving examples. The trend was not reversed until the accession of Diocletian.

4. Loss of rights

The Romans had for centuries understood that in national emergencies it was necessary to appoint a dictator who would take severe steps as

he thought appropriate – and for which he could not later be held accountable – but military necessity had turned every emperor into an outright dictator with the absolute right to pass laws, make civil and military appointments and command armies. Thus the old Roman spirit of seeking public office for personal honour and public benefit had all but died out. The Senate itself was largely abandoned by those qualified to sit in it, as it possessed virtually no real power. Moreover, the fiction by which the emperor referred to himself as *Princeps* (leading citizen) was vanishing. The emperor had become a sovereign in all but name, and it is now customary to refer to the empire during and after the time of Diocletian as a ‘Dominate’ (ruled by a lord) where previously it had been a ‘Principate’.

5. Walled cities

Another sign of the insecurity of the times was the number of towns and cities that now possessed their own surrounding walls for defence. Rome herself had to be similarly protected during Aurelian’s reign. The walls were built as quickly as possible from any materials that lay to hand; even tombstones were employed as part of the basic structure. The new walls enclosed generally a smaller area than the original town. This may have been for convenience in building the fortifications, but also reflected a steep decline in the Roman population. The smaller cities were cramped, and had no room for large monuments. The construction of an inner city wall at Athens has already been described.

6. Population decline

The population of the Roman world had fallen markedly as a natural consequence of the catastrophes of the third century. Wars, an endemic plague that had lasted for twenty years, causing at one point 7,000 deaths each day at Rome, and general insecurity, which has long been known to reduce birth rates, had all taken their toll. One interesting by-product from the disturbances in Gaul was that many wealthy landowners sold up their estates and fled to the relatively safer province of Britain, where they established the large villas whose remains survive to this day.

7. Collapse of agriculture and of trade

The lands had been ravaged and the population killed or fled. Inevitably there were fewer lands under cultivation, fewer farm hands and fewer mouths to feed. One solution to the shortage of unskilled agricultural labour was to ask cities to send out their idle occupants. The luxury of bread and circuses for the unemployed could no longer

be afforded by most towns. Equally, there were fewer markets in which to sell goods. Manufacturers found that their distant markets were inaccessible, due to dangerous communications, or the local people too poor to afford the wares. The glass and pottery industries are known to have been very hard hit in the mid-third century.

The consequence was that the emperors themselves had increasingly to sponsor their own industries, particularly for military goods, and this created unfair competition for any would-be entrepreneurs trying to start their own businesses.

8. Loss of skills

The most intractable problem was the loss of basic skills. The armies themselves had lost large numbers of men in the interminable civil wars, although there was an increasing tendency for the legions on both sides to count their numbers first and for the weaker to murder their own emperor before he led them into a hopeless battle. Worse still was the loss of skilled artisans who had died or been killed, and simply could not be replaced.

The advanced Greek sciences and philosophies virtually dried up in the mid-third century. The last great exponent of pagan philosophy, the Egyptian-Greek Plotinus (205–270), who taught at Rome from 245 after an apprenticeship in Alexandria, produced late in life several books intended to explain the workings of the universe and especially to explain the concept of evil. The writer Porphyry, who was his pupil, attempted to popularize the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, but it soon fell into disuse. The cultured emperor Gallienus, however, had been much impressed by the philosopher's work.

The extent and standard of art, as measured by sculptures, books and paintings, and of public buildings, declined markedly over this period. There are virtually no original written works excepting novels, most notably the lengthy *Aethiopica* by the Greek author Heliodorus. There are no useful histories, save those of Dexippus, and no major poets known from the mid-third century. Fragments of the lesser Latin poets Reposianus and Nemesianus have survived from 280–290. The later emperor Constantine the Great would celebrate his victory over Maxentius (312) with a standard triumphal arch in Rome, for which some of the sculptures had to be removed from a second-century monument. Constantine's arch still stands next to the famous Colosseum. Mosaics remained of good quality, as can be seen even in Britain, and the standard of engravature on Aurelian's new coins had much improved.

9. Serfdom

Some of the few remaining wealthy landowners within the empire, such as those in the undisturbed provinces of southern Italy and northern Africa, were in the happy position of being able to purchase large chunks of devastated farmland at knockdown prices from those who had fled. At the same time, the later emperors issued many ordinances to force surplus city dwellers onto the land, to which they were bound by other laws that obliged sons to take up the occupations of their fathers.

The embattled emperors depended heavily on land taxes to pay their armies, and connived – by the passage of legislation – at an arrangement with the landowners whereby the freemen, the clients, on the giant new estates were tied to the land, unable to leave. Thus they became serfs in a system recognizable as the forerunner of the medieval feudal system. Another part of the deal between landlord and emperor was that the estates should provide conscripts for the armies, and this burden also fell on the former clients. The net effect of these changes was that the flight from the land had been arrested, areas under cultivation increased – and the clients had become serfs. This section of the Roman community had involuntarily given up its freedom in order to avoid enslavement by the barbarians.

10. Settlement of barbarians within the empire

One solution to make good the population loss in the shattered areas was to settle captured barbarian tribesmen within the areas that they had devastated, providing a robust new workforce and enabling them to make good the damage they had caused. This was always a dubious policy, as was recognized even by contemporary writers. Many tribesmen were glad of the chance to contribute to Roman civilization, with the attendant benefits for themselves, while the Roman army found them a useful source for hardy recruits. However, some of the barbarians went through the motions of settlement before using their new territory as a convenient base from which to plunder their neighbours. The loyalty of the newly settled tribes must always have been uncertain; less so when the new settlers were themselves fleeing from more violent barbarians in their rear.

11. Degeneration of language

While the empire had remained a strong, cohesive unit, its standard of Latin had remained remarkably homogeneous in all the provinces, as evidenced by surviving inscriptions. The invasions of the mid-third century, and the separation of the breakaway Roman empires, caused

the degeneration of Latin speech and grammar into regional accents and variations. In later centuries, these variants would form the foundation of the modern Romance (Latin-derived) languages, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

12. Failure of the pagan religions and philosophy

Worship of the emperor, or of his *genius*, was never very convincing and adoption of the title of 'Lord and God' did not save any of the bearers (Aurelian, Probus and perhaps Carus) from assassination.

Sun worship offered ultimately nothing to humanity struggling under the burdens of barbarian invasions, plague and oppressive taxation. It implied no rules for behaviour and failed to explain the only too obvious struggle between good and evil. Philosophy was also a disappointment; a policy of ascension from the Body to the Soul to the Divine Mind to a godlike state (the 'One') by yearning and self-contemplation had little appeal or even challenge. Neither could stand up against the fast-rising movement of Christianity that offered so much more: salvation by Grace and immortality of the soul coupled with strict rules for conduct towards your neighbour and God.

The final legacy

The most enduring achievement of our Danubian supermen may therefore be simply that they allowed the empire to survive; to survive long enough for Christianity to become widespread even among the barbarians and thereby, in Gibbon's words, '[Christianity] broke the violence of the fall [of the Roman Empire], and mollified the ferocious temper of the conquerors.' Ironically, none of our supermen showed much enthusiasm for Christianity.

Aftermath

This book ends properly with the ascent of Diocletian and the united empire free, temporarily, from internal pretenders and external enemies. However, the sequel might as well be stated.⁴

The new emperor, Diocletian, was yet another former Danubian general who was to prove to be as outstanding an administrator as his predecessors had been military exponents. Diocletian realized early on that the empire simply could not any longer be handled by one man; whenever he was in any one part of it, pretenders arose or barbarians invaded in another. Carausius, given a fleet to combat the pirate menace in the North Sea, had fled with it in 286 to Britain. The Bagaudae tribe had rebelled once the former emperor Carinus had left Gaul, and barbarians had invaded in 286. Therefore he divided the

empire into two (286), appointing an old army friend and general, Maximian, as his coemperor in the west; Diocletian took the wealthier east. Both in turn appointed successors as emperors designate, known as caesars, to provide a system of rule known as the Tetrarchy (293). It meant that the most capable generals were assured a share of the imperial power, while the presence of effectively four rulers enabled a much closer guarding of the frontiers and posed an almost insuperable problem to any usurpers. The tetrarchs built magnificent palaces for themselves in their self-selected capitals of government. They also launched a savage new attack (303–304) on the fast-growing Christian Church that would prove to be both the last and also the fiercest of all the Church's persecutions, and would persist in the eastern empire until 311.

Diocletian raised the manpower of the army from some 300,000–400,000 in the time of Severus to more than half a million men under arms, and again favoured the concept of a frontier defence where barbarians were to be checked at the empire's perimeter and not within it. He continued the separation of the frontier garrisons, comprising mostly ex-barbarian soldiers, from the mobile 'rapid-response' units of infantry and cavalry that were generally made up from conscripts from the empire reinforced with barbarian special troops. This rapid expansion of the army must have caused a deterioration in the quality of the recruits.

Diocletian also reorganized the provinces into *dioceses* for better management and defence. The number of provinces within each *diocese* was approximately doubled from the original number, with extra provincial governors and their administrations, partly with a view to making rebellion harder for would-be usurpers. Each provincial governor now commanded about half the number of soldiers that he might have called upon to support a rebellion before the division of the provinces.

The Tetrarchy also had the effect that the numbers of senior administrative staff were perhaps quadrupled, the *dioceses* doubled the number of civil servants and the army had also been greatly increased. All had to be paid for; taxation was changed from an erratic collection when needed to a regular levy. Aurelius Victor claims that the new tax burden to pay for all this had been fair as first imposed by Diocletian, but that later emperors became greedy. The Christian writer Lactantius, a contemporary of Diocletian, paints a grim picture of the cost of the new bureaucracy and armies.⁵

Diocletian tried again to reform the currency after Aurelian's partial success in the 270s.^{6,7} He reminted the gold coin at sixty to a Roman pound of gold and a high-grade silver coin was issued at ninety-six to the pound weight of silver. Aurelian's old reformed *antoninianus* was standardized now at 3 per cent silver content, including face wash, and about 10 grams weight. The name of the new coin is unknown; it is today referred to by numismatists as a *follis*, although a very similar coin described in the ancient sources as a *nummus* appears in the fourth century. Again, the silver content of the *follis* drifted down over succeeding years to about 1.5 per cent silver before Constantine the Great introduced new reforms. Diocletian also took giant steps to improve the economy, but his attempts to control inflation by mandate (prices were not allowed to rise – by order) proved to be a failure despite the most stringent penalties.

On Rome's eastern front, Diocletian established numerous fortresses to watch over the Persians. The *Strata Diocletiana* provided a fortified main Roman road connecting many of the strategic points on the eastern frontier, and ran from Sura on the river Euphrates to the caravan city of Damascus. The new Persian king Narses (293–302) tried to renew hostilities against Rome with the invasion of Mesopotamia and Armenia in 296, followed by an incursion into Syria. The nearest tetrarch, Galerius, lost a battle in 297, but the new forts held firm and Galerius defeated Narses heavily in the following year, seizing the Persian ruler's family and harem. Diocletian was able to dictate terms to Narses, resulting in a pact in 299 that ended some fifty years of hostility between the two kingdoms and enabled trade to resume. The peace lasted for forty years.

After twenty years of rule (305) Diocletian committed the unique act of resigning as emperor, and forced his reluctant colleague to do the same, so that the caesars now stepped into power and appointed in turn their successors. Unfortunately, squabbles began as to the appointments, another dreary cycle of civil wars began and finally the empire was reunited (324) under the sole reign of Constantine, who was joint or sole emperor from 306 to 337.

The individual rule of Constantine ushered in a new era, described variously as 'the Police State', 'the beginning of the Middle Ages' or 'the end of the Roman Empire'. At first the new emperor was an ardent adherent to the Sun god, and *Sol Invictus* appears on his coins as late as 318. However, Constantine attributed his military victories in the civil war of 312 to a vision of Christianity, made it the official

religion and received the title 'The Great', bestowed by a grateful Church. He created what we would today recognize as a medieval court, which he moved from Rome to a new capital on the Bosphorus that he named modestly 'Constantinople'. The new capital was furnished by removing valuables from other parts of the empire, particularly from pagan temples, and it possessed its own senate so that the ancient centre of power in Rome was greatly diminished. At the same time, all power was concentrated completely into the hands of the emperor, who served as head of state and head of the Church. Constantine was a king in all but name.

Because Christianity was now the official Roman religion, Constantine was in the happy position of being able to grab gold from the richly ornamented pagan temples in order to institute another revision of the currency. He introduced the new *solidus*, a gold coin minted at seventy-two to a pound weight of gold, and this high-quality coin would be retained as the standard gold issue for centuries to come – well into the Middle Ages. He also minted a new, high-quality silver coin at ninety-six to the pound weight. The *folles* continued to deteriorate and its production had largely ended by 353. Simple silver-less coins of base metals still provided the small change for day-to-day transactions.

Constantine extended Diocletian's laws creating hereditary classes of citizens so that members could not move into any of the (many) occupations, such as the clergy, that were exempt from taxes. They could not even join the army. These changes resulted in widespread, overt hostility to the rule of the State. He also formalized the distinction between the frontier army and the better-paid mobile army, a decision that Zosimus would claim in the next century to have been responsible ultimately for the collapse of the Roman Empire. Worse, increasing use was made of barbarians within the army at all levels up to the top officers, while higher levels of immigration were permitted. The size of the legion, which had remained fairly constant at some 5,000–6,000 men for centuries, was reduced to 1,000 infantry and/or cavalry for flexibility of deployment. There were accordingly far more legions than previously.

The relative freedom from external enemies and civil wars allowed a final flourishing of Roman art in the middle of the fourth century. For a while pagan and Christian cultures coexisted comfortably in a nominally Christian empire, and this was when several historical works and the illustrated 'Calendar of 354' were produced. The latter

shows that the birthdays of several of the 'good' emperors were still celebrated officially as public holidays, with circus races in their honour.⁸ Present in the list are the birthdays of Augustus, the first true emperor, Trajan, Hadrian, the Antonine emperors, Severus and, more recently, Claudius II Gothicus, Aurelian and Probus, followed by Constantine and his successors. Remarkable omissions from the feast days are the names of Diocletian, Carus and his sons, Valerian and Tacitus. Less remarkable are the omissions of the despised Commodus, Caracalla and Gallienus. The immediate successors of Augustus are also absent. The list of feast days includes the celebration of several pagan gods, including *Sol Invictus*, but lacks the celebration of the pagan god Mithras, still very popular but significantly never adopted by an emperor. Christian feast days are not yet commemorated. It was at about this time that the emperor Constantius II transferred the celebration of Christmas to 25 December, allegedly in order to counter the worship of the Sun.⁹

There was a brief pagan revival under the last non-Christian emperor Julian (361–363) who, wisely, contented himself with encouraging pagan rituals rather than active persecution of Christians. While still a general, Julian had crossed the Rhine in 359 to harass the Alamanni after repelling their earlier invasion. In the east, the Persians again became aggressive under the rule of a new Shapur II. In the years from 337 to 350 Shapur made three raids into Mesopotamia and in 359 the Persians made a full-scale invasion, seizing several of the key fortress cities. Julian moved his armies to the east, but died in action; his Christian successor Jovian abandoned the Roman conquests so hard-won by Galerius in 298.

Again the empire had to be divided for defence, and the last strong emperor of the western empire, Valentinian (364–375), not only repelled a barbarian invasion but decided on a policy that had not been seen for decades. He carried the war back into the barbarians' territory across the Rhine and ravaged their lands intermittently for the next seven years. Undoubtedly this strategy was made possible by the fact that Valentinian had appointed his loyal younger brother, Valens, as emperor in the east, so that Valentinian could deploy safely the great part of his army for reprisals. Valentinian seems to have impressed Jerome, who described him thus¹⁰: 'Valentinian in another time would have been an exceptional emperor, and was similar to Aurelian in his behaviour, except that his undue strictness and a certain frugality were interpreted as cruelty and greed.' Valentinian

died of apoplexy at the height of his triumph over the German tribesmen, and in the east Valens and his legions were overrun by the resurgent Goths – who had been allowed to settle within the Roman frontier – at the battle of Adrianople in 378. The army was almost wiped out after faulty tactics (probably part of the Roman cavalry engaged the enemy before the complete army was properly deployed¹¹) and then smoke from blazing fires blowing into Roman faces, and Valens was never seen again.

The victorious barbarians swarmed over Thrace but were unable to break into its walled cities. The new emperors of west and east, respectively Gratian and Theodosius, settled the Goths within the Roman frontier and recruited heavily from them to replace the vanished legions. Yet the barbarians served under their own chieftains and could be persuaded to adopt Roman military tactics only with difficulty, while they were also reluctant to wear their heavy Roman armour. Even the famous Roman curved, rectangular shield gave way to a lighter, circular type. The imposition of strict discipline on Roman armies had become troublesome from the early third century, with their propensity to make and unmake emperors; now it would be well-nigh impossible. Although neither the bravery nor, surprisingly, the loyalty to Rome of the new recruits could be criticized, the fact remains that by the end of the fourth century the ‘Roman’ army amounted largely to just another barbarian force. Less surprisingly, the new army was not successful against the numerically superior waves of other barbarians pouring in across the frontiers.¹²

As the situation deteriorated, the increasingly Christian rulers and leaders of the empire took firmer steps to prevent its superstitious population from reverting to pagan worship in the hope of averting the barbarian onslaught. The use of public funds to pay for pagan ceremonies was halted in 384. In 389 all pagan festivals were stopped, excepting those deemed to be innocuous, such as the celebration of *Roma Aeterna*. Pagan temples were to be preserved as ‘ornaments’. Six years later, all pagan holidays were removed from the calendar but the games that once celebrated them were allowed to continue. The gladiatorial schools were closed in 399¹³ and the last gladiatorial games were held in 404, being then replaced by wild beast hunts. The barbarian army, however, remained predominantly pagan.

The first intimation of the end of empire came in 405–406, when swarms of tribesmen crossed the frozen Rhine and devastated Gaul. The Goths under their chieftain Alaric again rebelled, crossed the Alps

and finally sacked Rome herself in 410. The last stupendous achievement by a western Roman general, Aetius, was to ally with the Goths in Gaul to inflict a decisive defeat on the fearsome Attila and his Huns (451) – the only time that Attila was ever defeated and a crucial victory that held the west for civilization.

Thereafter the end came swiftly, and the last Roman emperor of the west was deposed by a Gothic king ruling from Gaul in 476. This is the date traditionally given for the fall of Rome. A lot of nonsense has been written about the reasons for the fall of Rome; Gibbon famously attributed the fall to the triumph of the barbarians and Christianity. It would be fairer to argue that the Church had defended and salvaged Roman culture. Modern historians have imputed a huge number of reasons, while some have even denied that anything unusual happened at all, arguing that Constantine's medieval court progressed simply to a German medieval court. It is unlikely that it felt that way to the citizens of Italy. The truth is that Rome's barbarian armies could not withstand the larger numbers of barbarians from across the frontiers.

By now the Roman Empire had been divided permanently into two. In the east a series of dynastic emperors ruled from Constantinople over what was effectively a Greek dominion, in speech and in culture, later called the Byzantine Empire. At the beginning of the sixth century, the emperor Justinian decided that it was time to restore the Roman Empire to its old entirety. Troops were despatched to Africa to oust or rule the Vandal invaders, and then to Italy under the command of a very talented general, Belisarius. The armies of the latter, like those of Aurelian, were greeted with huge enthusiasm after they had driven out the barbarians occupying both lands. The local citizens had already had their fill of barbaric standards of justice, with lands seized and the violence and insolence of the invaders.

Justinian recovered ultimately most of the Roman Empire, excepting the north-western provinces (Germany, Britain, Gaul and Spain), yet the reconquered areas of the west proved to be impossible to hold. The emperor had assumed that the restoration of taxes from the west would pay to maintain the necessary garrisons there. But the lands had been so devastated by the constant fighting, and the peoples so impoverished, that the armies could not be paid properly. Locally recruited garrisons faded away slowly for lack of pay. The eastern troops were withdrawn to stabilize other frontiers and to meet the Persian threat.

It was the Lombards who finally wrecked any hope of reuniting the two halves of the Roman Empire. Originally a North Germanic people known to the Romans of the first century, they began a massive migration westwards towards the end of the fifth century. It is thought that the migration was motivated by poor harvests in their own lands. They reached Italy in about 569, and the city of Ticinum (Pavia) had fallen to them by 572. All of Italy had been weakened by the interminable struggles for control between the previous Gothic invaders and the Byzantine newcomers, now the government. The small garrison army of the latter could do little in the face of the Lombardian locusts, and was driven back to a handful of coastal towns. These towns could be supplied by the Byzantine navy, which ruled the waters of the Mediterranean.

The new Roman Empire¹⁴ controlled all the old eastern Roman Empire, northern Africa and the Mediterranean islands, and even added to the east, annexing all of Armenia from the Persians in 590. The Balkan provinces had been severely ravaged by incessant invasions heading west, but the eastern Balkan province of Moesia remained largely untouched, and was also held by the Byzantines. After thirty years of war, the exhausted Byzantine and Persian empires signed a peace treaty in 630.

But by now the Arabs were mobilizing under Islam and they swept suddenly eastwards and westwards. The Persian Empire collapsed completely. The old capital city of the Persians, Ctesiphon, and its counterpart across the Tigris, Seleucia (or Coche), were both destroyed by the Arabs when the Persian Empire fell. The Arabs built a new capital city some 12.4 miles (20 kilometres) to the north, which they named Baghdad.

The main Byzantine army was heavily defeated in 636 by the Arabs in the north of Jordan, and after that the Arabs swarmed all over the Middle East and northern Africa. It required only a 4,000-strong Arab army to take Egypt against weak Byzantine resistance in 639 or 640. Thus, within just ten years, 'a combination of incompetence and apathy, disaffected soldiers and inadequate defensive arrangements resulted in a series of disastrous Roman defeats.'¹⁵ Only the rump of the old empire remained, and the Byzantines had lost all the tax revenue and grain from Egypt. By 698, the old Roman town of Carthage in north-western Africa had fallen, at which time virtually no Latin-speaking lands remained to the Byzantines. Meanwhile, the Balkans had been lost to the Bulgars by 679.

Thus Justinian's expanded eastern empire lasted fewer than 150 years, although the Byzantines retained Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica for centuries to come – long after all of northern Africa had been lost to the Arabs. The immediate Byzantine reaction was to hold fortified centres while avoiding set-piece battles with the Arabs. But finally the energetic emperor Leo III (717–741), and then his son Constantine V (741–775), managed to stop the rot. They checked the advance of the Arabs in open battles and recovered much of the Balkans from the Bulgars.

The Christian Byzantines, in slow decline, withstood the onslaught of Islam from the east for centuries, with the intermittent help, or hindrance, of the Crusaders. The last Roman emperor, Constantine XI, died in action at Constantinople when that great city fell in 1453 to the Turks, who were aided by gunpowder and cannon provided by rogue western traders. It was Gibbon who defined the 1,000-year period between the fall of Rome and the fall of Constantinople as the 'Middle Ages'.

Aurelian's original wall had not made a full circuit of the city, and this was completed in 402–403 under the emperor Honorius.¹⁶ It was rebuilt, perhaps after the earthquake of 502, by Theodoric the Goth as part of the general Gothic rebuilding programme in Rome. After little more than three decades, during the attempts by the eastern emperor Justinian to recapture Italy, his general Belisarius besieged Rome. The city would be taken and retaken at least three times. In 536 Belisarius overhauled the walls for defence against the Goths, but the Byzantines were ejected. Ten years later, having been damaged by the departing Goths, the walls were again repaired by Belisarius. The last recorded races at the Circus Maximus were run in 549.

Once more, the walls were repaired in the eighth and ninth centuries, against threats from seagoing Arabs and the intruding Lombard peoples, by the Christian popes who now provided virtually the only stable government in Rome. After St Peter's Basilica had been looted by the Arabs in 846, the old wall was extended to provide protection to the Vatican (848–852).

The legacy that the fallen Roman Empire left to its European successors comprised Christianity and Roman Law. The latter was written down finally in definitive form as a digest under the great emperor Justinian (527–565),¹⁷ and was abridged separately by the Gothic kings for reuse in Italy in about 500. It was the rediscovery of a copy of Justinian's Digest in northern Italy in about the year 1100 that

invigorated the readoption of Roman Law within Europe. Roman Law is currently the basis of most European law, but not in England, where Saxon Law prevailed and was passed on to the majority of countries of the British Empire, including North America.

Christianity, with its central tenet of 'love thy neighbour', had a strong civilizing effect on the conquering barbarians that overthrew the western empire. The Goths, for example, had already largely adopted the religion by the time they settled in Gaul. Later medieval nobles would create 'rules of war' incorporating Christian elements into the age of chivalry and heraldry, providing a strong influence to tame actions even in this field.

And what was the legacy of the barbarians? What do you do when you have stolen everything from the civilized peoples of the Roman world, ruined their lands, destroyed their buildings and given nothing back? You have to start fending for yourself, that's what. In the former province of Britain, the invading Anglo-Saxons built their mud huts amid the ruins of the greatest civilization that the ancient world had ever known. The structures of Rome and other cities were knocked down deliberately to furnish building materials for churches or farmsteads. Europe entered the Dark Ages.

Finally, what of the Sibylline Books? The last known consultation by the Senate of the genuine Sibylline Books was in 363, during the reign of the pagan emperor Julian. When the barbarians reached northern Italy, following their mass invasion across the Rhine in 405–406, the Christian emperor of the west, Honorius, ordered that the books be burned by his general Stilicho. They have never been seen again.

Conclusions

'Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (G. Santayana, philosopher, 1863–1952).

The barbarians had overthrown the western Roman Empire, but they could offer nothing to replace it. The Saxons who invaded Britain violently in the fifth century, destroying the remnants of Romano-British society, dwelt in hovels while they watched the collapse of great, but unmaintained, Roman buildings and aqueducts. The 'Dark Ages' lasted for hundreds of years, say from 500 to about 1100 in the more distant parts of Europe. When Gibbon finished his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* at the end of the eighteenth century, many parts of the world were still unexplored. Gibbon therefore considered whether a new race of barbarians, hitherto unknown, could undo the

civilization in Europe in the same way that Roman society had been ruined. He reasoned that technological developments in Europe, predominantly in weapons, ensured that no undiscovered race of barbarians could conquer Europe without first learning how to master the same or equivalent technologies. In other words, the barbarians would have first to become civilized before they could encompass the downfall of European civilization. One wonders what Gibbon would have to say about a Western civilization that sells sophisticated armaments to (relatively) barbarian potential enemies.

The second great lesson from the decline of the Roman Empire is the importance of ensuring that soldiers and their generals are subject to proper control by their masters. The English Civil War occurred nearly as soon as a general had a professional army to do his bidding, while rebellions in Africa and South America have been almost endemic. The only long-term solution appears to be to ensure that soldiers are drawn from the society they are supposed to defend, so that they are subject to peer pressure.

The third great lesson comes from the middle of the third century. Populations will take steps to find local solutions to pressing problems if the central authority will not act. Both the western and the eastern parts of the Roman Empire created their own governments, under Postumus in the west and Macrianus or Odaenathus in the east, when the acknowledged emperor failed to respond to invasions in these territories. The emperor, Gallienus, was perceived to be more interested in the suppression of invasions or rebellions elsewhere than in protecting the peoples of the west and east. He was actually removing their frontier troops, reducing their protection. Today the same phenomenon of finding local solutions can be seen in the trend for larger countries to split, such as has occurred with Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. At a different level, the perceived failure of the police to respond to residents' concerns has led to the increasing appearance of vigilante groups in Britain and the USA.

Postscript – the Triumph of the Barbarians¹⁸

It is not generally recognized today just how catastrophic for the future of civilization was the final collapse of the Roman Empire in the west. Contrary to general belief, it is prolonged periods of stability that result in the greatest human advancement, not the pressure of wars. Economic prosperity advances on all fronts when ordinary people can prepare long-range plans or can enjoy the luxury of leisured thought about life's problems. The economic affluence of

Britain, and the huge scientific advances of the nineteenth century, were greatly dependent upon the long period of unbroken peace under Queen Victoria.

The *Pax Romana* had created for about four centuries a settled condition – for most of the empire’s population – in which trade could flourish to the advantage of all, and new inventions could spread rapidly. The propagation of Christianity was perhaps the empire’s greatest achievement. When the barbarians marched in for the last time, trade collapsed and non-military inventions died.

The names of some of the invading tribes still echo through the ages as bywords for death and destruction – the Vandals and the Huns. The reputation of those old Roman foes, the Goths, has fared better. According to one of their own chieftains, he entered the remnant of the empire as a would-be plunderer, but recognized in time the value and the achievement of what he would destroy. And thus he stayed his hand. By now, constant contact between Romans and Goths had largely civilized the latter anyway, and many had converted to Christianity. Gothic kings ruled Rome herself after the last emperor had been deposed, and today we associate the Gothic name more with architecture than with pillage.

Even so, the areas controlled by the Goths were as uncertain of their futures as those held by the other barbarians, while the eastern Roman Empire lapsed into introspection and lethargy. Much Roman literature was lost, as were many Roman inventions from the old, great empire. Worst of all was the loss of economic efficiency with the collapse of international markets. Pottery and glassware were still manufactured, but were no longer of the old high standard, nor were they widely distributed. Glass would no longer appear in window frames. Tribes on the periphery of the empire would abandon even those advanced farming techniques that the Romans had taught them.

The collapse of trade routes and safe lines of communication reduced greatly the scale of building in brick or stone. The necessary raw materials simply could not be moved from quarries to building sites. In Rome herself, older monuments and buildings were knocked down to provide materials for new churches and new dwellings. The creation of the fine old country villa, with baths, mosaics and underfloor heating, ended and would not be seen again until the nineteenth century. The generally good hygiene practices of the Romans, engendered by flowing (piped) drinking and washing water, public baths and good medical treatment, had also gone, as had the

plentiful supply of food known to be necessary to create resistance to illness.

The great public records were upheld no longer, and literacy was not now widespread. In the general collapse of law and order, the Roman attempts at early police and fire-fighting forces were seen no more. Roman roads and viaducts (for conveying fresh water) were allowed to disintegrate, where previously they had been maintained regularly. Again, it was not until the nineteenth century that these deficiencies were made good again.

And what of the loss of inventions? When I was a child, I was taught that the magnetic compass was a Chinese invention imported to Europe in the Middle Ages. In more recent years, though, marine archaeology on the wrecks of Roman ships in the Mediterranean has discovered that each ship has a lump of rusted iron next to the steersman's post. The Romans had the magnetic compass. The barbarians lost it. A similar fate befell the secrets of Roman concrete and mortar. It was necessary to analyse chemically the mortar in Hadrian's Wall recently in order to discover the mystery of its extraordinary longevity. The Romans produced a concrete that could even be used underwater.

The Baths of Caracalla at Rome were one of the wonders of the medieval world. No one could understand how the long, unsupported concrete beams could stand up under their own weight. In the end, they collapsed. Subsequent investigation showed that the beams were made of iron-reinforced concrete. When the iron finally rusted, the concrete beams fell down. Today we use steel-reinforced concrete for much the same kind of purpose.

The Romans used water for power, as in water mills and various hydraulic machines. They employed springs in their carriages, again confirmed only from some recent archaeological finds in Germany. This technique had also to be rediscovered centuries later. The carriages were used on the impressive network of well-constructed Roman roads. Even Roman surveyors used methods subsequently forgotten and rediscovered, and they drew accurate maps. The Romans did not believe that the world was flat.

It is surprising to discover that the Romans never invented the printing press. They had advanced as far as putting several inked seals onto a wooden bar so as to make multiple official stamps on documents, but there is no evidence of printing. Despite their high levels of literacy, they never found it necessary to put individual

letters, instead of seals, onto their wooden bar. When slave labour is cheap, the need for labour-saving devices becomes greatly reduced. Those who wanted a copy of a book simply asked their slaves to copy the original.

The barbarians are sometimes credited with bringing an end to slavery in the Roman Empire, but the Christian empire was improving the lot of the declining number of slaves and had already terminated gladiatorial contests. Europe did not recover the state of civilization enjoyed by the Roman peoples until the nineteenth century. Even today, many parts of the world remain more backward than the Roman era. *That* was the achievement of the barbarians.

Key Dates

1

All dates AD unless otherwise indicated. Many dates from 235 to 285 are approximate only.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
753 BC	Traditional date of founding of Rome
96–180	Golden age of the Roman Empire (includes the Antonine emperors)
193	Septimius Severus emperor. Expansion in east. Consolidation of empire
211	Caracalla emperor. Debased <i>antoninianus</i> issued soon after
212	Caracalla makes all free men in empire full Roman citizens
c. May 214	Claudius, the future emperor, born
c. Sept. 214	Aurelian, the future emperor, born
217	Caracalla murdered. Macrinus emperor
218	Macrinus murdered. Elagabalus emperor
222	Elagabalus murdered. Severus Alexander emperor
223	Revolt of Artaxerxes (Ardashir) in kingdom of Parthia
226/7	Artaxerxes king in Parthia
230	Persians invade Roman Mesopotamia

c. Aug. 232	Probus, the future emperor, born
c. 233	Aurelian joins Roman army
235	Alexander murdered. Maximinus emperor
237–8	Persians again attack Mesopotamia and capture several cities
238	Rebellions in Africa and Rome against Maximinus. Maximinus murdered, as are the Senate's emperors.
241	Gordian III emperor Shapur I ruler in Persia. Instigates attacks on Roman provinces
243	Romans defeat Persians
244	Gordian III murdered. Philip emperor
248	Millennium Games in Rome celebrate 1,000 years of existence
249	Decius defeats and kills Philip. Decius emperor
250	Approximate date of start of plague in Roman Empire. Decius requires sacrifices to Roman gods by all citizens
251	Decius killed in action against Goths. Gallus emperor
252–3	Persians raid eastern provinces and capture Antioch
253	Aemilian defeats Gallus and becomes emperor
253	Valerian, general of Gallus, overthrows Aemilian and becomes

	emperor. His son, Gallienus, is made joint emperor	
253	Goths invade Balkans	
254–8	Gallienus defends Gaul and Rhine frontier against barbarians	
257	Valerian issues edict against Christians	
c. May 257	Aurelian possibly Consul Suffectus	
257–8?	Goths mount naval invasion of Balkans and Asia Minor	
260	Persians under Shapur invade Mesopotamia. Valerian taken prisoner by Shapur. Gallienus sole emperor. Gallienus issues edict of toleration for Christianity. Proliferation of pretenders and rebellions against Gallienus:	
	(i)	Postumus defects to create Independent Gallic Empire with Gaul, Britain and Spain
	(ii)	Macrianus rebels in east, defeats Persians and holds Syria, part of Asia Minor and Egypt
	(iii)	Several other rebellions
261 (or 263)	Agri Decumates overrun by Alamanni	
261	Gallienus defeats Macrianus and son	
c. 261	Gallienus appoints Odaenathus, king of Palmyra, to defend the Roman east.	

	Odaenathus overthrows last son of Macrianus
262–4	Invasion of Balkans and Asia Minor by Goths. Sack of Temple of Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus. Gallienus defeats Goths
262–7	Odaenathus crushes Persians, recaptures Mesopotamia. Postumus defeats barbarians on Rhine
264	Triumph of Gallienus at Rome
264–8	Gallienus reforms Roman cavalry
267 or 268	Odaenathus murdered in palace plot. His wife Zenobia succeeds in the name of their son Vaballathus
267/8	Goths and Heruli seaborne invasion of Balkans and Asia Minor.
268	Athens destroyed Goths crushed by Gallienus at Battle of Nish. Revolt of Aureolus
c. Aug. 268	Gallienus murdered. Claudius II emperor. Aureolus killed
268	Postumus, emperor of Independent Gallic Empire, murdered. Succeeded briefly by Marius, then by Victorinus
c. 268	Spain reverts to central rule
c. 268/9	Zenobia captures

269	Antioch for Palmyra Claudius defeats Alamanni near Lake Garda. Goths invade Balkans
269/270	Claudius destroys Goths at Naissus. <i>Gothicus Max.</i>
270	Zenobia occupies Arabia and Egypt
July/Aug. 270	Claudius dies of plague. Quintillus declared emperor by Senate
c. Sept. 270	Aurelian declared emperor by army
autumn 270	Quintillus commits suicide. Aurelian backdates accession to August
c. Sept.? 270	Aurelian accepted by Senate as emperor
c. Nov. 270	Aurelian defeats Juthungi on Danube
Jan. 271	Aurelian takes first consulship
early 271	Invasion of northern Italy by Alamanni
c. 270–1	The twenty-year plague finally fades away
c. Mar. 271	Aurelian makes peace with Vandals. <i>Sarmaticus Max.</i>
c. May 271	Aurelian defeated by Alamanni at Placentia. Riots in Rome. Rebellions by generals. Aurelian defeats Alamanni in three major battles in northern Italy. <i>Germanicus Max.</i>
c. June 271	Aurelian in Rome.

	Suppression of civil disorders.
	Victorinus of Independent Gallic Empire murdered.
	Tetricus becomes emperor. Palmyrene troops occupy Asia Minor
271	Work begins on wall surrounding Rome (work finished during reign of Probus)
autumn 271	Aurelian sets out to east. Defeats Goths in Balkans, creating enduring peace.
	<i>Gothicus Max.</i> Roman province of Dacia probably evacuated (or 272 or 273)
spring 272	Zenobia/Vaballathus declare themselves as <i>Augusta</i> and <i>Augustus</i>
May/June 272	The general Probus recovers Egypt for Aurelian
May/June 272	Aurelian defeats Zenobia at the Battle of Immae, nr. Antioch
c. June 272	Aurelian defeats Zenobia at the Battle of Emesa
summer 272	Aurelian besieges Zenobia at Palmyra
summer(?) 272	Death of Persian ruler Shapur I
c. August 272	Palmyra falls. Aurelian makes punitive expedition to Persia.
	<i>Restitutor Orientis</i> , <i>Arabicus Max.</i> , <i>Palmyrenicus Max.</i> , <i>Parthicus Max.</i> , <i>Persicus</i>

	<i>Max.</i>
c. Jan. 273	Carpi tribe defeated by Aurelian on middle Danube. <i>Carpicus Max.</i> Possibly <i>Dacicus Max.</i>
c. Jan. 273	Revolt at Palmyra
c. March 273	Aurelian retakes Palmyra
c. June-July 273	Rebellion in Egypt. Aurelian restores order and recovers Egypt
Jan. 274	Aurelian consul for second time
April 274	Aurelian defeats Tetricus in Gaul
Summer 274	Gallic mints produce coins for Aurelian. Britain submits voluntarily to Aurelian. <i>Britannicus Max.</i>
Summer/autumn 274	Triumph of Aurelian at Rome. <i>Restitutor Orbis.</i> Temple of Sun dedicated at Rome. Aurelian marries Ulpia Severina. Aurelian's legal and monetary reforms at Rome. Improved coinage issued. Increased handouts of food to Roman population
274-5	Aurelian suppresses rebellion at Lugdunum, Gaul
Jan. 275	Aurelian consul for third time
early 275	Aurelian defeats barbarians who have invaded province of Raetia
summer 275	Aurelian sets out with army for Persia. Barbarians crushed in

Sept./Oct. 275	Balkans Aurelian murdered en route. <i>Interregnum</i> – no appointed successor emperor
Nov./Dec. 275	End of <i>Interregnum</i> . Tacitus declared emperor
winter 275/6	Heruli invade Asia Minor. Franks and Alamanni invade Gaul
276	Tacitus defeats Heruli. <i>Gothicus Max</i> . Bahram III becomes ruler of Persians
c. June 276	Tacitus dies (or murdered). Florian succeeds. Probus declared emperor by army
Sept. 276	Probus defeats and kills Florian
late 276	Probus defeats Goths in Asia Minor. <i>Gothicus Max</i> .
277	Probus takes first of five consulships
277–8	Probus defeats all barbarians in Gaul. <i>Germanicus Max</i> .
278	Probus defeats Vandals/Sarmatians in Illyricum. <i>Restitutor Illyrici</i>
279	Probus moves to east. Brigand Lydius overthrown. Usurper Saturninus overthrown
280	Probus at Antioch. Peace with Persians. <i>Persicus Max</i> .
280–1	Revolts of Bonosus and Proculus in Gaul, and of governor of Britain.

	All overthrown by Probus
autumn 281	Triumph of Probus at Rome
282	Probus sets out for Persia. Civil war in Persia/Armenia between Bahram III and Narses
Aug. 282	Carus rebels in Raetia
Sept. 282	Probus murdered. Carus becomes emperor. Sons Carinus and Numerian appointed joint emperors
282	Carus and Numerian move to Persia
283	Carus defeats Persians, recovers all of Mesopotamia. <i>Persicus Max.</i>
	Death of Carus. Succeeded by Carinus and Numerian
284	Death of Numerian. Diocles (Diocletian) declares himself emperor
285	Diocletian defeats Carinus in Balkans. Diocletian now sole emperor
286	Maximian joint emperor
293	Diocletian introduces 'Tetrarchy' system to create new emperors. Death of Persian ruler Bahram III
305	Abdication of Diocletian and Maximian
306	Constantine becomes

324	joint emperor Constantine reunites empire by defeating last of surviving joint emperors. Constantine declares Christianity to be the State religion
337	Death of Constantine. Three sons divide the empire
361–3	The new emperor Julian revives paganism. As state religion, it does not survive his death
405–6	Mass invasion of Gaul by Visi-Goths who cross the frozen Rhine
410	Rome sacked by Ostro- Goths
451	Goths and Romans together defeat Attila the Hun
476	Gothic kings rule Rome directly from Gaul. Traditional date for the end of the Roman Empire in the west. The eastern (Byzantine) Empire survives, with capital at Constantinople
527–65	The Byzantine emperor Justinian recaptures Rome and much of Italy. Codification of Roman Law
1453	The Turks sack Constantinople. End of the Roman Empire in the east. Scholars fleeing from Constantinople to Europe provide the

seed to trigger the
Italian Renaissance

Appendix B

Consulships (Ordinarii) known from the Fasti

1

Inscriptions found at Rome, or in Codex-Calendar of 354, listing all the Roman Consuls.

Names in bold type denote emperors as consuls. Latin numerals (e.g. 'II') denote that the consul is taking another consulship after a previous one.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Consul I</i>	<i>Consul II</i>
253	Volusianus II	Valerius Maximus
254	Valerian	Gallienus
255	Valerian III	Gallienus II
256	L. Valerius Maximus II	M. Acilius Glabrio
257	Valerian IV	Gallienus III
258	M. Nummius Tuscus	Mummius Bassus
259	Aemilianus (Dexter)	T. Pomponius Bassus
260	P. Cornelius Saecularis II	C. Iunius Donatus II
261	Gallienus IV	L. Petronius Taurus Volusianus
262	Gallienus V	Nummius Fausianus
263	Nummius (Ceionius)	Albinus II Dexter (or Maximus)
264	Gallienus VI	Saturninus
265	Licinius Valerian II	Lucillus
266	Gallienus VII	Sabinillus
267	Paternus	Arc(h)esilaus
268	Paternus II	Marinianus
269	Claudius	Paternus
270	Flavius Antiochianus II	Virius Orfitus
271	Aurelian	Pomponius Bassus II
272	Quietus	Iunius Voldumnianus
273	Tacitus	Iulius Placidianus
274	Aurelian II	(C. Iulius?) Capitolinus
275	Aurelian III	(T. Nonius?) Marcellinus
276	Tacitus II	Aemilianus
277	Probus	Paulinus

278	Probus II	Virius Lupus
279	Probus III	Paternus II
280	Messalla	Gratus
281	Probus IV	C. Iunius Tiberianus
282	Probus V	Victorinus
283	Carus	Carinus
284	Carinus II	Numerian
285	Carinus III (later Diocletian II)	C. M. Aurelius Aristobulus
286	M. Iunius Maximus II	Vettius Aquilinus

The annual consulships were nominally taken together by consuls with equal power. By imperial times, it had become customary to have several pairs of consuls to fill out the year, the first pair giving their names to the year.

The ancient records, known as the *Fasti*, preserve for this period only the *Consularii Ordinarii*. However, a *Consul Suffectus* might be appointed to replace an ordinary consul who had died or was ill during his term of office. The *Suffectus* appointment was reckoned to be of inferior prestige to the main consulship, but counted towards the number of times that a consul had held his position. There were also *Ornamenta Consularia*, honorary consulships that could count towards the number of total consulships held. Because there remain no lists of such consuls, they can only be inferred. For example, the emperor Valerian took his first consulship in year 254, but his third in 255. Unless there is a mistake in the *Fasti*, he must have been *Consul Suffectus* (he would hardly have awarded himself the inferior *Ornamenta*) in 254 as well. By the late third century, suffect consulships were so insignificant that sometimes they were not felt to be worth adding to the inscriptions that senators wrote for their own tombstones.

<i>Ancient Name</i>	<i>Modern name</i>
Abrittus	Nr. Razgrad (Bulgaria)
Adrianople	See Hadrianopolis
Agri Decumates	Swabia (south-west Germany)
Alexandria	Alexandria (Egypt)
Amida	Diyarbakir (Turkey; on the Tigris)
Anchialus	Pomorie, nr. Burgas (Bulgaria)
Ancyra	Ankara (Turkey)
Antioch	Antakya (Turkey)
Aquileia	Aquileia (Italy)
Aquincum	Budapest (Hungary)
Ariminum	Rimini (Italy)
Armenia	(Middle East)
Asia Minor	Turkey
Athenae	Athens (Greece)
Augusta Treverorum	Trier (France)
Augustodunum	Autun (France)
Aureliani	Orléans (France)
Axomis	Axum or Aksum (Ethiopia)
Babylon (Nile)	Baboul, nr. Old Cairo (Egypt)
Batnae	Suruc (Turkey)
Bostra	Busra esh-Sham (Syria; border with Jordan)
Britannia	Britain
Burdigala	Bordeaux (France)
Byzantium	Istanbul (Turkey)
Caenophrurium	Corlu or Simekli (Turkey, n. of Bosphorus)
Caesarea	(several; mostly in Turkey)
Caesena	Cesena (Italy)
Carthago	Carthage (Tunisia)
Catalaunum	Chalons-sur-Marne (France)
Chalcedon	Kadikoy (Turkey)
Coche (Seleucia)	Al-Mada'in (Iraq)
Colonia Agrippinensium	Cologne (Germany)
Constantinople	Istanbul (Turkey)
Cremna	nr. Gurmegi (Turkey)
Cremona	Cremona (Italy)
Ctesiphon	Taysafun (Iraq)
Cularo	Grenoble (France)

Cumae	Cuma, n. of Naples (Italy)
Cyzicus	Bal Kiz (Turkey)
Dacia	Romania
Dap(h)ne	Beit-al-Maa, nr. Antioch (Turkey)
Doberus (river)	Strimon River (Greece/Bulgaria)
Emesa	Homs (Syria)
Ephesus	Selcuk (Turkey)
Etruria	Tuscany (Italy)
Fanum Fortunae	Fano (Italy)
Gaul	France
Grumentum	Grumento (Italy)
Hadrianopolis	Edirne (Turkey, n. of Bosphorus)
Hatra	al-Hadr (Iraq)
Illyricum	(old) Yugoslavia
Immae	(Turkey)
Isauria	Mountainous region embracing parts of provinces of Galatea, Cilicia and Pamphylia
Ister (river)	Danube River
Istrus	Istria (Romania, Black Sea coast)
Londinium	London (Britain)
Lugdunum	Lyons (France)
Maeotis ('lake')	Sea of Azov
Marcianopolis	Reka Devniya (Bulgaria)
Margum	Orasje, nr. Dubravacia (Croatia)
Mediolanum	Milan (Italy)
Mesopotamia	(between Euphrates and Tigris, Syria/Iraq)
Metaurus (river)	Metauro River (Italy)
Misenum	Miseno (Italy)
Moguntiacum	Mainz (Germany)
Mt Haemus	Gt. Balkan Mountains (Bulgaria)
Naissus	Nis (Serbia)
Narbo	Narbonne (France)
Nestus (river)	Nesta River (Bulgaria/Greece)
Nicaea	Iznik (Turkey)
Nicomedia	Izmit (Turkey)
Nicopolis ad Istrum	Nicupe (Bulgaria)
Nisibis	Nusaybin (Turkey/Syria border)
Orontes (river)	Nahr-el-Asi River (Turkey)
Ostia	Ostia (Italy)
Oxyrhynchus	El-Bahnasa (Egypt)
Palmyra	Tudmor (Syria)
Panticapeum	Kerch (Crimea)

Parthia	kingdom embracing Iran/Iraq/s. Russia/Afghanistan
Perinthus/Heraclea	Marmaraereglisi (Turkey, n. of Bosporus)
Persepolis	n.e. of Shiraz (Iran)
Petra	Petra (Jordan)
Philippopolis (Thrace)	Plovdiv (Bulgaria)
Piraeus	Piraeus (Greece)
Pisae	Pisa (Italy)
Pisaurum	Pesaro (Italy)
Pityus	Pitzunda (Georgia)
Placentia	Piacenza (Italy)
Ptolemais	El-Manshah (Egypt)
Ravenna	Ravenna (Italy)
Rhenus (river)	Rhine river
Rhesaena	Resulayn (Syria)
Roma	Rome (Italy)
Samosata	Samsat (Turkey)
Seleucia ad Tigrim	See 'Coche' above
Serdica	Sofia (Bulgaria)
Sirmium	Sremska Mitrovica (Serbia)
Siscia	Sisak (Croatia)
Smyrna	Izmir (Turkey)
Tarentum	Taranto (s. Italy)
Tarraco	Tarragona (Spain)
Tarsus	Tarsus (Turkey)
Thessalonika	Salonica (Greece)
Tibur	Tivoli (Italy)
Ticinum	Pavia (Italy)
Trapezus	Trabzon (Turkey)
Tripolis	Tarabulus or Tripoli (Lebanon)
Troy	Troy or Truva (Turkey)
Tyana	nr. Kemerhisar (Turkey)
Uzappa	Ksour Abd el-Melek (Tunisia)
Verona	Verona (Italy)
Zenobia	Nr. Tibni (Syria)

Appendix D

The Biography of Aurelian by Vopiscus

Author's new computer study

The Augustan Histories are an account of the lives of the later Roman emperors, supposedly written by six separate authors of whom one was Vopiscus. However, the real authorship continues to fascinate classical scholars. Despite the authors' own claims that they wrote early in the fourth century, most modern historians prefer to accept Dessau's 1889 conclusion that the Histories were all written by one author late in the fourth century.

Marriott¹ examined the Latin text of all the alleged authors listed in the Augustan Histories, using a computer-assisted automatic analysis of average sentence length (i.e. mean number of words per sentence). The 'standard deviation' of these averages provides a measure of the range of each sentence length from their average length. He then compared the 'standard errors of the differences' (SEDs), which are calculated by comparison of their standard deviations, and found that the sentence lengths of each of the six authors were not significantly different. Considering also their grammatical similarities, he concluded that the six authors could be presumed to be the same, particularly as their sentence lengths were significantly different from late fourth-century authors. The following table summarizes Marriott's results:

Table I

<i>Author</i>	<i>Mean sentence length</i>
Spartianus	16.0
Gallicanus	14.2
Pollio	16.6
Augustan Histories average	16.1
Anon De Rebus Bellicis (control)	21.7
Capitolinus	16.5
Lampridius	16.0
Vopiscus	15.4
Codex Theodosianus (control)	26.2
A. Marcellinus (control)	c. 36 (depends on book)

Marriott chose to include in the analysis of the Augustan Histories not

only each author's main text, but also the text of the many documents that they quoted verbatim, on the assumption that the documents were also forgeries by the one supposed author writing in the late fourth century. If the Augustan Histories are what they claim to be – biographies of emperors by six authors writing early in the fourth century – the documents that they cite, usually taken to be one author's forgeries, would be authentic (at any rate before a later editor got to work on them). Inevitably the documents should possess a sentence length different from the main text of the Augustan Histories, and therefore should have been removed before the computer analysis.

Marriott's controls were the Latin texts *De Re Bellicis*, the *Codex Theodosianus* and 'A. Marcellinus', all from the same period. The *Codex Theodosianus* is a legal summary, with its artificial language, written by many hands. It is difficult to understand why a legal codex should be compared with anything. Further, a correct control for the 'pure' text of each of the six authors of the Augustan Histories, i.e. neglecting the added documents, would be an early fourth-century manuscript, as the average sentence length of Latin prose might have changed between the beginning and end of the fourth century. More appropriate controls might be found in the addresses to the early fourth-century emperors within the *Panegyrici Latini*, a collection of laudatory speeches addressed to contemporary emperors.

Sansone² also queried the computer analysis, on the basis that subsequent editors of the text could have interjected punctuation different from that of the original manuscript. The computer analysis had considered that sentences be terminated with a full stop, a colon or a question mark, but these might not have been part of the source text, and there remained the problem of how to deal with clauses enclosed within hyphens.

The last problem may be described as a minor difficulty of technique. I have created a new computer program called 'Counter', which, like Marriott's, counts the number of words in a file, assesses mean sentence length and estimates the standard deviation (a measure of the range of mean values). It tests additionally whether there exists a significant statistical difference in mean sentence length between two files. I was surprised to discover that my mean sentence length per chapter measured over the eleven chapters of the first edition of this book lay in the remarkably tight band of 22.1 +/- 2.5 words, while a book I wrote ten years previously (on a completely different

subject) had a mean sentence length over seventeen chapters of 22.5 +/– 4.6 words. There was no statistical difference between the two sets of sentence lengths. We assume, then, that mean sentence lengths can be used to compare authorship.

I have used ‘Counter’ to explore the biography of Aurelian, the second longest in the Augustan Histories. It was written allegedly by Vopiscus, and contains several cited documents as well as a curious discontinuity in the narrative about two-thirds of the way through the text. It is therefore of interest to compare the authorship of the two parts of the text before and after the discontinuity using Marriott’s measure of sentence length, both including and omitting any documents cited in the text. My figures differ slightly from those given by Marriott. The explanation may lie in different source texts, different text accuracies or different programmatic assessments of what constitutes a word. The results are given in Table II:

Table II: Biography of Aurelian

<i>Source</i>	<i>No. words</i>	<i>No. sentences</i>	<i>Mean sentence length</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>
Aurelian biography (Marriott’s original data)	7,740	482	16.1	10.3
Full text of Aurelian biography	7,775	454	17.1	11.6
Full – no documents	5,446	293	18.6	11.8
1st Part biography	5,828	331	17.6	12.5
1st Part – no documents	3,926	200	19.6	12.7
2nd Part biography	1,947	123	15.8	08.7
2nd Part – no documents	1,520	093	16.3	09.3

My data show, from comparison of SEDs by the procedure of Marriott, that there is a better than 98 per cent probability that the differences between the mean sentence lengths of the first and second parts of Aurelian (in both cases after removal of cited documents) are real, rather than due to chance. This is a highly significant outcome, statistically. Does this provide evidence of tampering by late addition of material to the Aurelian biography in the Augustan Histories? The grammatical structures of the two parts of the biography seem to be too similar to support such an explanation. The controversy therefore remains unresolved.

Next, I compared the two parts of the Aurelian biography, after removal of documents, with texts known to be contemporary with their claimed dates of writing. I chose two addresses to the emperor Maximian (AD 286–305) in the *Panegyrici Latini*, where they are

labelled 'X' and 'XI' (Table III).

Table III: Aurelian Biography and Panegyrici Latini

<i>Source</i>	<i>No. words</i>	<i>No. sentences</i>	<i>Mean sentence length</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>
Aurelian I – no documents	3,926	200	19.6	12.7
Aurelian II – no documents	1,520	093	16.3	09.3
Maximian (X)	2,653	109	24.3	16.3
Maximian (XI)	2,925	134	21.8	15.2

There is not a statistically significant difference between the two Maximian texts, nor between Maximian XI and Aurelian I. However, Maximian X is significantly different (99 per cent probability) from both parts of the Aurelian biography. The panegyrics have average sentence lengths comparable with those of the *De Rebus Bellicis* and *Codex Theodosianus*, and thus provide no evidence that authors at the beginning of the fourth century wrote generally shorter sentences than those at the end of the fourth century.

In conclusion

The same computer technique that was used to verify whether the Augustan Histories were written by one hand, rather than by six authors, can also be used to demonstrate that more than one hand was involved within a single biography by a single author. The two sections of the biography of Aurelian by 'Vopiscus' show signs of having been written by different hands. It is impossible to say whether this was due to one author copying uncritically two distinct sources, one after another, or if a later copyist appended further material to Vopiscus' original text. Analysis of the panegyrics provides no evidence that writers at the beginning of the fourth century used shorter sentences than those at the end of the same century. The theory that a single late fourth-century author wrote the entire Augustan Histories remains unproven, so far as analysis of sentence lengths is concerned.

Notes

Introduction

1. *Journal of Roman Studies* (1910–2013). All indexed references found in the *JRS* to Aurelian or Palmyra or the wall round Rome.

2. (i) Watson, A., *Aurelian and the Third Century* (Routledge, 1999) provides a long overdue survey of the twentieth-century academic literature concerning Aurelian, for those already familiar with the background; (ii) Cizek, E., *L'Empereur Aurélien et son Temps* (Les Belles Lettres, 1994) fulfils much the same requirement for French speakers; (iii) Kienast, D., *Römische Kaiser – Tabelle* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992) offers a modern German view of the third-century emperors, as well as those of other periods. Interestingly, the consensus among French, German and Swiss writers regarding disputed texts often differs from the Anglo-Saxon view.

3. Saunders, R. T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991). The thesis is not a biography, in the ordinary sense of providing a continuous narrative from birth to death. Instead, the author provides a series of snapshots of events in Aurelian's life, with a comprehensive survey of the literary or other evidence for each event. Where doubt exists, the author provides expert and considered opinions. This thesis can be obtained only with difficulty or at high cost through UMI dissertation services.

4. Syme, R., *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1971). The peculiarities of the Augustan Histories (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae*) have been widely discussed since before Gibbon's time, and there is even a bi-annual colloquium now dedicated to the subject. The most comprehensive single account of the 'Histories' and the modern academic viewpoint can be found in Syme.

5. Saunders, op. cit., p. 43 et seq.

6. Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000). Pictures of Roman coins are available on the Internet, e.g. the 'Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins': <http://vcrc.austincollege.edu>. Coin dealers also provide many excellent pictures with a narrative.

7. For inscriptions: (i) the huge volumes of the nineteenth-century *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL; Prussian Academy). Several attempts have been made to update these volumes with more recently discovered inscriptions, but today the emphasis is on making the

inscriptions available electronically; (ii) 'Frankfurt Latin inscriptions': www.manfredclauss.de; 'Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg': www.uni-heidelberg.de/institute/sonst/adw/edh/.

8. Rea, J.P. (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, for the papyri discovered at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt published in the volumes of the periodical.

9. The general absence of Greek inscriptions concerning Aurelian can be discerned from the indices of the *Inscriptiones Graecae*, which mention several other Roman emperors. However, at least three genuine Greek inscriptions are known, e.g. CIG II:2349n, AE (1927) 81.

10. Pond, E.A., *The Inscriptional Evidence for the Illyrian Emperors Claudius Gothicus through Carinus 268-284 AD* (PhD Thesis, Minnesota, 1970.) Cited in Saunders, op. cit., p. 72.

11. Parker, P., *The Empire Stops Here* (Pimlico, 2010).

12. Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vols. I–III (Everyman's Library, 1910; 1980 reprint). Gibbon's famous work has been justly admired, discussed and criticized since it was first published towards the end of the eighteenth century.

13. Homo, L.P., *Essai sur le Règne de l'Empereur Aurélien (270–275)* (a Fontemoing, 1904). French.

14. Saunders, op. cit., p. 89 et seq.

15. Isaac, B., 'The Meaning of Limes and Limitanei in Ancient Sources' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 78: 125–47 (1988).

16. (i) Smith, W. (ed.), *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, Vols. I & II, John Murray, 1854; (ii) Talbert, R.J.A. (ed.), *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

Chapter 1

1. Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, chapter IX (Everyman's Library, 1910; 1980 reprint).

2. Ferrill, A., *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Thames & Hudson, 1986) gives a good account of the means by which the Roman army could secure its frontiers. Ferrill is a military, rather than a Roman, historian.

3. Jordanes, *On the Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, translated by C.C. Mierow (widely distributed on the Internet, e.g. <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/jordgeti.html>).

4. Büntgen, U., et al, '2,500 Years of European Variability and

Human Susceptibility', *Science*, 331, 578 (2011).

5. Greene, K., *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (Batsford, 1986), p. 83.

Chapter 2

1. As well as continuing to use a general distillation of Roman history, the following Roman sources of Latin history are being worked in: (i) Eutropius, *Breviarium*, translated by H.W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1993); (ii) Orosius, Paulus, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, translated by R.J. Deferrari (Catholic University of America Press, 1992); (iii) Victor, Aurelius, *De Caesaribus*, translated by H.W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1994). In Latin only: Anon., *Epitome de Caesaribus*, Appendix to Aurelius Victor (Teubner, 1911). General sources: Grant, M., *The Roman Emperors* (Phoenix-Giant, 1997); Brauer, G.C., *The Age of the Soldier Emperors* (Noyes Press, 1975); Dodgeon, M.H., *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 226–363: A Documentary History* (ed. S.N.C. Lieu, Routledge, 1993).

2. Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, chapter X (Everyman's Library, 1910; 1980 reprint).

3. Parker, P., *The Empire Stops Here* (Pimlico, 2010), p. 272.

4. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, translated by G.A. Williamson, [chapter 7](#) (Penguin, 1965, reprinted 1989).

5. Stoneman, R., *Palmyra and its Empire* (University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 93, gives this translation of Shapur's rock relief: 'In the third campaign when we attacked Carrhae and Edessa and were besieging them, Valerian Caesar marched against us. He had with him a force of 70,000 from [every province]. And beyond Carrhae and Edessa we had a great battle with Valerian Caesar. We made prisoner ourselves, with our own hands, Valerian Caesar and the others, chiefs of that army, the praetorian prefect, senators. We made all prisoners and deported them to [Persia]. And Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia we burned, ruined and pillaged.'

6. (i) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Vol. III, 'The Thirty Pretenders', translated by D. Magie (Loeb, Harvard University Press, 1932, reprinted 1982); (ii) Drinkwater, J.F., *The Gallic Empire*, *Historia-Einzelschriften*, 52: 13–276 (1987).

7. The Augsburg Altar. AE (1993) 01231.

8. For taxation generally: Jones, A.H.M., *The Later Roman Empire*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Blackwell & Mott, 1964, reprinted John Hopkins

paperbacks, 1986).

9. The debasement of coins: (i) Casey, P.J., *Roman Coinage in Britain* (Shire Archaeology Press, 1980); (ii) Green, K., *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (Batsford, 1986); (iii) coins held at the British Museum. The specific details of the *antoninianus* and barbarous radiates are taken from (iv) Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 2 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), pp. 83 et seq. and 168.

10. Green, op. cit.

11. P. Oxy. 1411. The pretenders were Marcianus and Quietus.

Chapter 3

1. Principal original sources for this and succeeding chapters: (i) Eutropius, *Breviarium*, translated by H.W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1993); (ii) Festus, *Breviarium*, translated by T.M. Banchich and J.A. Meka (De Imperatoribus Romanis, 2001), www.roman-emperors.org/festus.htm; (iii) Jerome, *Chronicle*, translated by R. Pearse et al, www.tertullian.org/fathers; (iv) Orosius, Paulus, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, translated by R.J. Deferrari (Catholic University of America Press, 1992); (v) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, translated by D. Magie, Vol. III (Loeb, Harvard University Press, reprinted 1982), selected extracts; (vi) Syncellus, *The Chronography of George Synkellos*, translated by A. Adler and P. Tuffin (Oxford University Press, 2000); (vii) Victor, Aurelius, *De Caesaribus*, translated by H.W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1994); (viii) Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, translated by J.J. Buchanan and H.T. Davis (Trinity University Press, 1967). Available only in the original Latin or in Latin translation from Greek: (i) Zonaras, Joannes, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, translated by M. Pinderi, Vol. II (ed. Weberi, 1844); (ii) Anon., *Epitome de Caesaribus*, Appendix to Aurelius Victor (Teubner, 1911); (iii) Eusebius/Hieronymus, *Die Chronik des Hieronymus* (ed. R. Helm, Akademie Verlag, 1984); (iv) Jordanes, *Romana et Getica* (ed. T. Mommsen, Berolini: Weidman, 1961); (v) Cedrenus, Georgius, *Historiarum Compendium* in *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, uncertain translator (ed. Weberi, 1844), pp. 454–463.

2. Anon., mid-third-century, in ‘Eis Basilea 7-14’, quoted by Stoneman, p. 97, see [note 4](#)(iii) below.

3. Eusebius, *The Church History*, translated by McGiffert, A.C. (1890). Translations in the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,

4. i) Dodgeon, M.H., *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 226–363: A Documentary History* (ed. S.N.C. Lieu, Routledge, 1993). ii) Parker, S.T., *Romans and Saracens. A History of the Arabian Frontier* (Dissert. Series 6, American School of Oriental Research, 1986. iii) Stoneman, R., *Palmyra and its Empire* (University of Michigan Press, 1992). iv) Parker, P., *The Empire Stops Here* (Pimlico, 2010).

5. Petrus Patricius, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, ed. C. Mueller, 1883. Latin.

6. Stoneman, op. cit., p. 108.

7. Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, translated by N.P. Milner (Liverpool University Press, 1993). Book II: 6.

8. Among others, Jordanes, *On the Origins and Deeds of the Goths*, translated by C.C. Mierow (widely distributed on the Internet, e.g. <http://people.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/jordgeti.html>).

9. Dexippus, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, ed. C. Mueller, 1883. Latin.

10. Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 361.

11. Placidianus inscription at Vif, just south of Cularo. CIL 12:01551.

12. *Panegyrici Latini, In praise of Later Roman Emperors*, translated by C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers (University of California Press, 1994).

13. Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991), p. 152.

Chapter 4

1. ‘Vopiscus of Syracuse’ in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Vol. III, ‘The Deified Aurelian’, translated by D. Magie (Loeb, Harvard University Press, 1932, reprinted 1982).

2. Chronicler of 354 in *Monumenta, Germaniae Historica, Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.

3. Malalas, John, extract *From Valerian to Diocletian*, translated by B. Nestor, www.ancientworlds.net/aw/Post/1021862.

4. (i) Zumptio, C.T., *Annales Romani*, 3rd edn. (Berolini, 1862). Latin; (ii) *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, Vol. I (ed. W. Smith, J. Walton, 1870); (iii) *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*

(‘PIR’, 2nd edn., 1933). Latin.

5. Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991), p. 109.

6. Principal original sources (see [chapter 3](#), [note 1](#)).

7. (i) Simkins, M. and Embleton, R., *The Roman Army* (Osprey ‘Men at Arms’ series, Vols. 46, 1984 revised edn. and 93, 1979); (ii) Jones, A.H.M., *The Later Roman Empire*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Blackwell & Mott, 1964; reprinted John Hopkins paperbacks, 1986).

8. Eadie, J.W., ‘Development of Roman Mailed Cavalry’ in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 57: 161–73 (1967).

9. Heliodorus, *An Aethiopian Romance*, translated by T. Underdowne, revised F.A. Wright, Book 9 (G. Routledge & Sons, 1923).

10. Wilkins, A., *Roman Artillery* (Shire Archaeology, 2003).

11. Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, translated by N.P. Milner (Liverpool University Press, 1993). Book II: 25.

12. Simkins and Embleton, op. cit.

13. Vegetius, op. cit. Book II: 15–18.

14. Sabin, P., ‘The Face of Roman Battle’ in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 90: 1–17 (2000).

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1. Principal original sources (see [chapter 3](#), [note 1](#)).

2. Continuator of Dio, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (ed. C. Mueller, 1883). Latin.

3. (i) Dexippus, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (ed. C. Mueller, 1883). Latin; (ii) Petrus Patricius, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (ed. C. Mueller, 1883). Latin.

4. Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991), p. 181.

5. Homo, L.P., *Essai sur le Règne de l’Empereur Aurélien (270–275)* (a Fontemoing, 1904). French.

6. ‘Vopiscus of Syracuse’ in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Vol. III, ‘The Deified Aurelian’, translated by D. Magie (Loeb, Harvard University Press, 1932, reprinted 1982).

7. Julius Priscianus. CIL 11:06308 and 06309.

8. (i) Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, chapter XI (Everyman’s Library, 1910, 1980 reprint); (ii) Saunders,

R.T., 'Aurelian's Two Juthungian Wars' in *Historia*, 41: 311–27 (1992).

9. (i) Continuator of Dio, op. cit.; (ii) Marcellinus, Ammianus, *The Later Roman Empire*, translated by W. Hamilton (Penguin, 1986); (iii) Polemius Silvius, *Monumenta, Germaniae Historica. Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.

10. Gaius Valerius Sabinus. CIL 11:01214 (Placentia); CIL 05:06421 (Ticinum).

11. Conway, C.P.M., 'Aurelian's Bellum Monetarium: An examination' in *Past Imperfect*, 12 (2006).

12. Saunders, op. cit. p. 185; see [note 4](#).

13. Polemius Silvius, *Monumenta, Germaniae Historica. Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.

14. Sotgiu, G., *Studi sull' epigrafia di Aureliano* (Palumbo, 1961), p. 47. Italian.

15. Continuator of Dio, op. cit.

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17. New army units. AE (1908) 00136, CIL 03:00327, CIL 08:02665, CIL 08:02676, CIL 08:22631, 15a.

18. Sotgiu, op. cit., p. 64.

19. Chronicler of 354 in *Monumenta, Germaniae Historica, Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.

20. Stoneman, R., *Palmyra and its Empire* (University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 117.

21. Rea, J.P. (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London), No. 2904 (XL, 1972), dated to 17 April 272.

22. Stoneman, op. cit., p. 131.

23. Stoneman, op. cit., p. 76 et seq., 114.

24. (i) Potter, D.S., *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (Routledge, 2004), p. 270; (ii) Saunders, op. cit., p. 427 et seq.; see [note 4](#).

25. Richmond, I.A., *The City Walls of Imperial Rome* (Clarendon Press, 1930).

26. Saunders, op. cit., p. 360; see [note 4](#).

27. Codex of Justinian, 5.72.2. This rescript of Aurelian has no year, but is widely thought to have been given in 272. The only other plausible year would be 273, when Aurelian was on campaign in the

east. Justinian's Codex can be found at www.theLatinLibrary.com. Latin.

28. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Book LXVIII, 13. Found in *Dio's Rome*, Vol. V, Books 61–76 (AD 54–211), translated by H.B. Foster (Project Gutenberg EBook).

29. Two Dacias in 283. AE (1912) 00200.

30. Cizek favours the evacuation of Dacia in 273. See Cizek, E., *L'Empereur Aurélien et son Temps* (Les Belles Lettres, 1994).

31. Cizek, op. cit.

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2. Rea, J.P. (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London), No. 2921 (XL, 1972), dated to 17 April 272 acknowledges Aurelian and Vaballathus as joint rulers in Egypt; No. 2902 (dated to 24 June 272) gives Aurelian as sole ruler. No. 1413 is dated to 1–25 September, and the year is thought to be 272 (possibly 273) from context.

3. (i) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Vol. III, 'The Deified Aurelian', translated by D. Magie (Loeb, Harvard University Press, 1932, 1982 reprint); (ii) Continuator of Dio, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (ed. C. Mueller, 1883). Latin.

4. Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, translated by A. de Sélincourt (Penguin Classics, 1960).

5. Downey, G., 'Aurelian's victory over Zenobia at Immae AD 272' in *Transactions of American Philological Association*, 81: 57–68 (1950).

6. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, translated by G.A. Williamson (Penguin, 1965, reprinted 1989), [chapter 7](#).

7. The quotation is from Eusebius, op. cit. (no translator given: Translations in the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.html), and appears also in Zonaras, Joannes, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, translated by M. Pinderi (ed. Weberi, 1844). Vol. II. Latin.

8. Stoneman, op. cit., p. 156.

9. Graf, D.F., 'Zenobia and the Arabs' in *The Eastern Frontier of the*

Roman Empire, eds. French and Lightfoot, BAR Intl Series (1989), pp. 143–167. Later, the son of Jadhima's nephew, now the king of the Tanukh, would ally himself with Persia, but later still he changed sides to become a Roman ally. Thus the Tanukh would provide material assistance to the emperor Diocletian and his caesar Galerius. The son's tomb still exists, and is dated to 328, with inscriptions in a rare, pre-Arabic cursive script.

10. Letters to and from Zenobia: (i) Petrus Patricius, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (ed. C. Mueller, 1883). Latin; (ii) Continuator of Dio, op. cit. (iii) *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Vol. III, 'The Thirty Pretenders' and 'The Deified Aurelian' (see 'principal original sources').

11. Gawlikowski, M., e.g. 'Les Défenses de Palmyre' in *Syria*, 51: 231–242 (1974).

12. Potter, D.S., *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (Routledge, 2004), p. 272.

13. Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991), p. 397.

14. Saunders, op. cit., p. 429.

15. Parker, H.T.M., 'The Legions of Diocletian and Constantine' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 23: 175–89 (1933).

16. Parker, S.T., *Romans and Saracens. A History of the Arabian Frontier* (Eisenbrauns, 1986), pp. 60, 137.

17. 'Camps' in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, eds. Bowerstock, G.W., Brown, P., Grabar, O. (Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 362.

18. Legio III Aureliana. E.g. CIL 08:02665.

19. Saunders, op. cit., p. 247.

20. Gawlikowski, M., e.g. 'Aurélien et le temple de Bel' in *Syria*, 48: 412–421 (1971). Also cited in note 1(ii) above. 'Septimius Haddudan, illustrious senator, son of Septimius Ogeilu Maqqai, who had aided the army of Aurelian Caesar ...' The month is given as March, but the year of the inscription has been lost. However, Aurelian can only have been present at Palmyra from a March beginning 273. The inscription could, and has, also been dated to March 274.

21. Marcellinus, Ammianus, *The Later Roman Empire*, translated by W. Hamilton (Penguin, 1986).

22. P. Oxy. 1413, cited by Bowman, A.K., 'Papyri and Roman Imperial History, 1960–75' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 66: p.156 (1976). Translation can be found in: Johnson, A.C., *Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian*, No. 364, p. 617, in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, ed. T. Frank, Vol. II (John Hopkins Press, 1936).

23. Potter, op. cit., p. 272. The rescript is found in *Codex Justinianus* 7:14:4; the papyrus in P. Oxy. (51) 3613.

24. Parker, P., op. cit., p. 402 (see [note 1](#)(iv)).

25. (i) Brauer, G.C., *The Age of the Soldier Emperors* (Noyes Press, 1975); (ii) 'Anthony of Egypt, Saint' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*© CD 2000 Deluxe Edition 1999–2000.

Chapter 7

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2. Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 396.

3. (i) Victor, Aurelius, *De Caesaribus*, translated by H.W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1994); (ii) Polemios Silvius, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.

4. Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991), p. 252.

5. (i) Victor, Aurelius, op. cit.; (ii) *Panegyrici Latini, In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, translated by C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers (University of California Press, 1994).

6. Drinkwater, op. cit. (see [note 1](#)(iii) above.)

7. Drinkwater, op. cit., p. 147.

8. Inscriptions throughout this chapter have been obtained by computer searches:

(i) Frankfurt Latin Inscriptions: www.manfredclauss.de;

(ii) Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg: www.uni-heidelberg.de/institute/sonst/adw/edh/.

Also *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL), Prussian Academy. Latin; Peachkin, M., *Roman Imperial Titulature and Chronology* (Gieben, 1990). There is very little inscriptional evidence in Britain for

Aurelian, but *Caerleon Roman Fortress* (Welsh Historic Monuments, 1988, revised 1994) claims: 'Fragments of a recently discovered inscription record further building activity under Aurelian in AD 274–275, perhaps the restoration of the barracks.' The fortress was the headquarters of Legio II Augusta, and would be abandoned in 287.

9. Homo, L.P., *Essai sur le Règne de l'Empereur Aurélien* (270–275) (a Fontemoing, 1904). French.

10. Vagi, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 369.

11. 'Mother of the Camps': CIL 02-14-02:00927 (= AE (1930) 00150).

12. Harris, W.V., 'A Revisionist View of Roman Money' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 96: 1–24 (2006).

13. (i) For references to the mint-master Sabinus, see [chapter 5](#), [note 10](#); (ii) Casey, P.J., *Roman Coinage in Britain* (Shire Archaeology Press, 1980); (iii) coins inspected by the author at the British Museum; (iv) 'Virtual Catalog of Roman Coins': <http://artemis.austincollege.edu/acad/cml/rcape/vcrc/coin-info.html>; (v) Webb, P.H. (ed. Mattingly, H. and Sydenham, E.A.), *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. 5A (Spink, 1927).

14. Vagi, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 369.

15. Vagi, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 367.

16. Saunders, op. cit., p. 315.

17. Webb, op. cit. (see [note 13\(v\)](#) above.)

18. Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 367: the 'Aurelianus' (or 'Aurelianianus'). Vol. 2, p. 86: Vagi says that the method of application of the 2 per cent silver wash is unknown, since such 'silver' coins are usually in poor condition when excavated today. The coiners may have given a silver coating (to give the shiny effect) or could have leached the coin with acid to reduce base metals and thereby enhance the relative silver content. The outer shell of silver would then be pressed by a die.

19. Stoneman, R., *Palmyra and its Empire* (University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 164.

20. (i) Erim, K.T., Crawford, M., Reynolds, J., *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61: 171–177 (1971); AE (1973) 0526A; (ii) Bourne, Richard J., private communication (2005). The augmented inscription, from Bourne's notes from a lecture by John Kent at the British Museum,

was 'bicharactam pecuniam ... qvae in maiore orbis partec ... qvattvor denariorvm'.

21. P. Oxy. 1414. Dated to 271/2. Translation: Johnson, A.C., *Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian*, No. 437, p. 701, in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome*, ed. T. Frank, Vol. II (John Hopkins Press, 1936).

22. A search of the Frankfurt electronic database (www.manfredclauss.de) of Latin inscriptions in 2014 furnished ninety-eight results for 'corrector'. Of these, seventy-six related to the title in Italian provinces, including Sicily, while for a further fourteen there was no province assigned, usually due to damage to the original inscription. Precisely one example relates both to a non-Italian province (Achaëa) and to a datable event (the reign of Diocletian).

23. (i) Bowman, A.K., 'Papyri and Roman Imperial History' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 66: 153–173 (1976). (ii) Saunders, op. cit., p. 429.

24. Marcellinus, Ammianus, *The Later Roman Empire*, translated by W. Hamilton (Penguin, 1986). Book 26: 6.7.

25. Justinian's Codex can be found at www.theLatinLibrary.com. Latin.

26. (i) Zumptio, C.T., *Annales Romani*, 3rd edn (Berolini, 1862). Latin; (ii) *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* ('PIR', 2nd edn., 1933). Latin; (iii) *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, Vol. I, ed. W. Smith (J. Walton, 1870).

27. Rea, J.P. (ed.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London), Vol. XL, 1972.

28. (i) Salzman, M.R., *On Roman Time – The Codex Calendar of 354* (University of California Press, 1990); (ii) *Chronicler of 354: Monumenta, Germaniae Historica. Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.

29. Jones, A.H.M., *The Later Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (Blackwell & Mott, 1964, reprinted John Hopkins paperbacks, 1986).

30. Bartolini, R., *Monete di Roma Imperiale* (Mondadori, 1996; 2nd edn. 2001), p. 138. Translated: 'He (Aurelian) sought in addition to weaken the epidemic by improving hygiene and providing for the sustenance of the poorest layer of society.'

31. Saunders, op. cit., p. 381.

32. Roman baths repaired. CIL 10:00222 and 11:00556.

33. Pellegrino, A., *Ostia Antica. Guida agli Scavi* (Soprintendenza Archeologica di Ostia, 2000). The official guide to the remains of Roman Ostia, it makes no mention of Aurelian. On the contrary, the city was in decline from the middle of the third century, partly due to the economic and political crises of the period, but also because much of the commercial activity had moved to the artificial port of Portus (modern Porto).

34. See [note 13](#) for references for coins.

35. de Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Brill, 1976).

36. 'Baalbek', Microsoft® Encarta© 1994.

37. Salzman, op. cit.

38. Saunders, op. cit., p. 343; see [note 4](#).

39. *Agones* were competitions between citizens, with religious content and usually held every four years. *Ludi* were public entertainments.

40. The *Pontifex dei Solis* is mentioned only in the Augustan Histories, but the existence of the post is confirmed by inscriptions, e.g. CIL 06:01418 and 06:01779.

41. A sixth-century record claims that eight porphyry columns were removed for use in the Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. Cited in Platner, S.B. and Ashby, T., *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* – section *Sol, Templum*, Oxford University Press (1929). This old book can now be searched on the Internet at the Perseus Digital Library, www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/.

42. Potter, D.S., *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire* (Clarendon Press, 1990).

43. (i) Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, translated by G.A. Williamson (Penguin, 1965; reprinted 1989), [chapter 7](#); (ii) St Augustine (Latin text at www.theLatinLibrary.com); (iii) Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, translated by W. Fletcher (Translations in the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.toc.html).

44. 'Dionysius, Saint', 'Felix I, Saint', 'Eutychian, Saint', 'Gaius, Saint' in Encyclopaedia Britannica© CD 2000 Deluxe Edition, 1999–2000.

45. Wilson, R.J.A., 'What's new in Roman Baden-Württemberg?' (Review article) in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 96: 210, footnote 60 (2006).

46. Saunders, op. cit., p. 268; see [note 4](#).
47. Saunders (op. cit., p. 275; see [note 4](#)) has observed that Zonaras' original Greek text describes Eros very specifically as 'the registrar of judicial sentence/condemnation', yet Pinderi's nineteenth-century translation of the same text into Latin (used by this author; see [chapter 3, note 1](#)) is given as '*a responsis externis*' – in charge of outward answers – before Zonaras adds 'or, as others say, an informer'. Buchanan and Davis (also [chapter 3, note 1](#)) translate the original Greek of Zosimus for Eros as 'appointed to publish abroad imperial legal opinions', which resembles closely Pinder's translation.
48. CIL 06:30976. '*Dedicata domino nostro Aureliano Augusto III et Marcellino consulibus VII Kalendas Maias ...*'
49. Anon. <http://www.empereurs-romains.net/emp40.htm>.
50. Kienast, D., *Römische Kaiser – Tabelle* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992) and references therein.
51. Sotgiu, G., *Studi sull' epigrafia di Aureliano* (Palumbo, 1961), p. 31. Italian.
52. Francis Bacon, *Sermones Fideles sive Interiora Rerum* (Latin text at www.theLatinLibrary.com).
53. Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. I, chapter XXI (Everyman's Library, 1910; 1980 reprint).
54. *Sarmaticus Max.* i) The worn-out inscription is CIL 03:14184, 03. ii). The Dalmatian inscription is AE (1925) 00057.
55. Daguet, Anne, 'L Domitius Aurélianus Perpetuus Imperator' in *Antiquités Africaines*, 28: 173–86 (1992). French.
56. Eusebius, *The Oration of Constantine* (no translator given; Translations in the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/toc.html).
57. Julian, Vol. II, *The Caesars*, translated by W.C. Wright (Loeb, Harvard University Press, 1913; reprinted 1969).
58. (i) 'Valentine, Saint' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*© CD 2000 Deluxe Edition, 1999–2000; (ii) City of Terni: www.diocesi.terni.it.
59. Homo, op. cit., p. 375; see [note 9](#).

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2. Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 1 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 369.
3. Vagi, op. cit., p. 371.
4. Chronicler of 354: *Monumenta, Germaniae Historica. Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.
5. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* ('PIR', 2nd edn., 1933). Latin.
6. Vagi, op. cit., p. 372.
7. Potter, D.S., *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395* (Routledge, 2004), p. 277.
8. Papyrus for *Persicus Max.* P. Mich. 11, 610.
9. Julian, Vol. II, *The Caesars*, translated by W.C. Wright (Loeb, Harvard University Press, 1913; reprinted 1969).
10. Potter, op. cit., p. 278.
11. Chronicler of 354, op. cit.
12. Numerian's rescript. *Codex Justinianus* 5:52:2. Although it is certain that Numerian must have signed it, from the location, the rescript names Carus (*sic*; now deceased), Carinus and Numerianus as joint emperors, yet is dated certainly to March 284, the single year in which Carinus and Numerian were joint consuls.

13. Deification of Carus and Numerianus. Inscriptions e.g. CIL 08:02717. Coins: e.g. RIC V (Vol. II), Carus #126; Numerian #424. Shared victory titles: CIL 08:02717.

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1. Victor, Aurelius, *De Caesaribus*, translated by H.W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1994).
2. de Blois, L., *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Brill, 1976), p. 215.
3. Eadie, J.W., 'Development of Roman Mailed Cavalry' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 57: 161–73 (1967).
4. Main sources: (i) Blockley, R.C., *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire* (Francis Cairns at Liverpool University, 1983); (ii) Carey, M. and Scullard, H.H., *A History of Rome*, 3rd edn. (Macmillan, 1979, reprinted 1986); (iii) Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. IV, chapter XXXVIII (Everyman's Library, 1910, 1980 reprint); (iv) Jones, A.H.M., *The Later Roman Empire*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Blackwell & Mott, 1964; reprinted John Hopkins paperbacks, 1986).

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6. Casey, P.J., *Roman Coinage in Britain* (Shire Archaeology Press, 1980).
7. Vagi, D.L., *Coinage and History of the Roman Empire*, Vol. 2 (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), p. 95.
8. Chronicler of 354, *Monumenta, Germaniae Historica. Chronica Minora*, Vol. 1 (ed. Mommsen, 1892). Latin.
9. Stoneman, R., *Palmyra and its Empire* (University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 187.
10. Jerome, *Chronicle*, translated by R. Pearse et al, www.tertullian.org/fathers.
11. Hughes, I., *Imperial Brothers: Valentinian, Valens and the Disaster at Adrianople* (Pen & Sword Military, 2013), chapter 17.
12. Ferrill, A., *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (Thames & Hudson, 1986).
13. Salzman, M.R., *On Roman Time – The Codex Calendar of 354* (University of California Press, 1990).
14. Haldon, J., *Byzantium – A History* (Tempus Publications, 2005), pp. 30–41.
15. Haldon, op. cit., p. 37.
16. Richmond, I.A., *The City Walls of Imperial Rome* (Clarendon Press, 1930).
17. Justinian, *Digest of*, Vols. I–III, eds. Mommsen, Krueger and Watson (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).
18. Greene, K., *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (Batsford, 1986).

Appendix A

1. (i) Clinton, H.F., *A Chronology of Rome and Constantinople* (Oxford University Press, 1853; reprinted 1911); (ii) *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, ed. W. Smith (J. Walton, 1870), Vol. I; (iii) Carey, M. and Scullard, H.H., *A History of Rome*, 3rd edn. (Macmillan 1979; reprinted 1986) – a more modern listing; (iv) Dates for the Aurelian period are largely derived from Saunders, R.T., *A Biography of the Emperor Aurelian (AD 270–275)* (PhD Thesis, Cincinnati, 1991).

Appendix B

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Appendix C

1. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, ed. W. Smith, (John Murray, 1854), Vols. I & II.

Appendix D

1. Marriott, I., 'The authorship of the *Historia Augusta*: Two computer studies' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 69: 65–77 (1979).

2. Sansone, D., 'The computer and the *Historia Augusta*: A note on Marriott' in *Journal of Roman Studies*, 80: 174–7 (1990).